This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HD WIDENER
HW SMXQ T

Digitized by Google

Gov 512.49
B

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY

FROM THE BEQUEST OF
THOMAS WREN WARD
Treasurer of Harvard College
1830–1842

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MAN OR THE STATE?

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MAN OR THE STATE?

A Group of Essays by Famous Writers

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

WALDO R. BROWNE

"What is it to be born free and not to live free? What is the value of any political freedom but as a means to moral freedom? Is it a freedom to be slaves, or a freedom to be free, of which we boast?"

THOREAU

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
MCMXIX

Digitized by Google

Gov 512.49
B

COPYRIGHT 1919 BY
B. W. HUEBSCH
PRINTED IN U. S. A.

HARVARD COLLEGE
DEC 30 1930
LIBRARY
B
Substituted for a copy lost
(Ward fund)

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	vii
I.	P. KROPOTKIN: THE STATE, ITS HISTORIC ROLE	1
II.	HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE: INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE EXERCISED BY GOVERNMENT . .	44
III.	RALPH WALDO EMERSON: POLITICS	57
IV.	HENRY DAVID THOREAU: ON THE DUTY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE	70
V.	HERBERT SPENCER: THE RIGHT TO IGNORE THE STATE	90
VI.	LEO TOLSTOY: APPEAL TO SOCIAL REFORMERS .	100
VII.	OSCAR WILDE: THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER SOCIALISM	118

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

INTRODUCTION

"The great events of the day occupy my thoughts much at present. The old illusory France has collapsed; and as soon as the new, real Prussia does the same, we shall be with one bound in a new age. How ideas will then come tumbling about our ears! And it is high time they did. Up till now we have been living on nothing but the crumbs from the revolutionary table of last century, a food out of which all nutriment has long been chewed. The old terms require to have a new meaning infused into them. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are no longer the things they were in the days of the late-lamented guillotine. That is what the politicians will not understand; and therefore I hate them. They want only their own special revolutions — revolutions in externals, in politics, etc. But all this is mere trifling. What is all-important is the revolution of the spirit of man."

Thus in 1870 wrote Ibsen, greatest in his day of the rare originative geniuses who "carry in their brains the ovarian eggs of the next generation's or century's civilization." And now at last, after nearly fifty years, the fulfilment of that prophecy is at hand. Not Prussia merely, but the most of monarchist Europe has collapsed. The old ideas are tumbling about our ears at a rate which possibly Ibsen himself did not foresee. Even that hoariest and most impregnable of them all, the idea of the absolute State, though propped and buttressed during the past five years as never before in history, is everywhere visibly tottering — where it has not already tumbled. A new age is indeed upon us!

Probably no proof of failure less complete and terrible than the recent cataclysm could have shaken man's mystic devotion to the State. However it has oppressed, impov-

Digitized by Google

erished, impeded him, he has for the most part always regarded it as an inevitable and indispensable part of the divine machinery, as remote from his control as gravitation or the weather. All through the centuries he has blindly acceded to its insatiable demands, blindly conformed to its endless inhibitions, blindly sacrificed himself and his possessions to its alleged interests. Fed so long on this monotonous diet of subserviency, the State came quite naturally to imagine that there existed no law of God or man to which it was not superior — of which fatal delusion the consequences are today writ large in blood and fire across half the world.

The great underlying principle of English law, according to Dickens, is to make business for itself. The great underlying principle of the State, it might be said with equal truth, is to make power for itself. As Renan pointed out, "it knows but one thing — how to organize egotism." So preoccupied with this task has it been that it long ago forgot, if indeed it ever knew, that such a thing as the human soul exists. But now at last, aroused to rebellion by almost intolerable afflictions, the human soul begins to assert its supremacy. Of that duel the ultimate issue is certain and near at hand. The servant who has so long usurped the master's place must return below stairs; the instrument must finally yield to its creator.

But for all its crimes against humanity, the time is not yet when we can abolish the State entirely, as Ibsen urged, and "make willingness and spiritual kinship the only essentials in the case of a union." Eventually, unless moral progress is an illusion, that ideal will be realized. Mankind, however, has yet to serve a long and rigorous novitiate before it can be worthy of such a consummation. Philosophic anarchism is a creed that postulates too much nobility, too much self-restraint and self-abnegation, in common human nature to be immediately practicable. For a few decades (perhaps even a few generations) longer, Man must con-

Digitized by Google

tinue to bear as best he may with those accusing symbols of his moral imperfection, the policeman and the soldier.

If, then, the State cannot at once be dispensed with, the alternative is reform, revision, melioration of the State idea. Here we shall at least be sure of a multitude of counsellors, each with his favorite State-theory or State-pattern to urge for adoption. It would be well to dismiss at the start those slightly anachronistic physicians who invariably prescribe more centralization as a cure for the ailments of our over-centralized State. Their ideal is pre-war Prussia, though they will not often admit it. But of Prussia as a working model of State-theory we might say, as Talleyrand said of the English public school system, "It is the best we have ever seen; and it is abominable." The earnest seeker for light will turn with far more of hope and interest to storm-swept Russia. Out of the Soviet experiment, and out of the ideas of the Guild Socialists in England, is evolving what may well prove to be the State-norm of the immediate future — or something very like it.

But it should never be forgotten that the problem of the State is essentially a spiritual one. Political forms and institutions, legal systems, legislative enactments, all the charters and codes and statutes in Christendom, are valid and stable only as they tend to assure freedom and justice to individuals. Political freedom is of value only as it leads to moral freedom, and there can be no public justice that does not find its ultimate sanction in private conscience. / The State, if it is to endure at all, must devote itself henceforth to the organization of altruism rather than egotism; it must slough off completely its old predatory and repressive character, and embrace the ideals of brotherhood and association. Above all, it must respect and preserve inviolate at whatever cost the principle of individual freedom. Not freedom to prey upon others, which was really the essence of the old individualism, but freedom from being preyed upon. Not the shadow of freedom, but its substance: not political free-

Digitized by Google

dom merely, but moral and economic freedom. If a government cannot permanently exist half slave and half free, how much less so can a human being!

More than this I shall not venture by way of prophecy. My purpose has been simply to indicate the problem, to accentuate the need of reform. Definite solutions I must leave to abler intellects. My present appearance is in the lowly capacity of Editor, and as such I fall back upon the precedent established or at least invoked by Carlyle: "Editors are not here, foremost of all, to say How. . . . An Editor's stipulated work is to apprise *thee* that it must be done. The 'way to do it,'— is to try it, knowing that thou shalt die if it be not done. There is the bare back, there is the web of cloth; thou shalt cut me a coat to cover the bare back, thou whose trade it is. 'Impossible?' Hapless Fraction, dost thou discern Fate there, half unveiling herself in the gloom of the future, with her gibbet-cords, her steel-whips, and very authentic Tailor's Hell, waiting to see whether it is 'possible'? Out with thy scissors, and cut that cloth or thy own windpipe!"

In considering the problem of the State the great thing, as Ibsen has pointed out, is not to allow one's self to be frightened by the venerableness of the institution. For those inclined to be thus frightened, as well as for a good many others, I have thought that a useful purpose might be served by bringing together a group of essays, written by some of the foremost thinkers of our time, which at least make plain that in neither its history nor its workings is the State a sacrosanct affair; that it is by no means an inerrant or irreproachable, even a reasonably efficient, social instrument; that under some other collective administrative arrangement humanity might achieve a far nobler and happier existence. The authors of these essays are of widely various, even directly antagonistic, social creeds; yet in the main points of their indictment against the State they are at one.

Digitized by Google

A certain congruity of selection and arrangement will, I hope, be apparent in the contents of this volume. Kropotkin's essay deals with the origin and historic evolution of the State. The chapter from Buckle, one of the greatest of philosophic historians, records the State's notable failure as a legislative agent. The three following papers constitute the challenge of the higher Individualism, as embodied in Emerson's serene and optimistic generalities, looking toward a society perfected from within; in Thoreau's keen eloquence, asserting the supremacy of personal Conscience over all other authority; in Herbert Spencer's clear-cut logic arguing the right of freedom from external control as an inevitable corollary to his "first principle" of social ethics — that "Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man." In the next essay Tolstoy pleads the case for Christian anarchism, or social salvation through individual self-perfection combined with passive resistance to the State. Finally, we have Oscar Wilde's glowing and trenchant statement of the manner of life that would be possible in a really free society.

If this little book did no more than make generally available, as it does, the first of these essays, I should feel that its existence were sufficiently justified. Prince Kropotkin's avowed position as an apostle of philosophic anarchism will of course repel those numerous persons who, like crows, invariably take flight with much raucous cawing from the verbal bugaboos which they are too timid or too stupid to investigate. But it need alarm no others. Despite his faith in a society based upon "willingness and spiritual kinship" rather than upon coercion, Kropotkin holds a secure place among those of our time whose work has left a permanent impress upon human thought. Every reader of his "Mutual Aid" knows how deeply and widely he has explored the origins of society,— upon what a vast range of data his conclusions are based. The essay here reprinted is a pro-

Digitized by Google

duct of the same study, though of course restricted to a narrower field, that went to the making of "Mutual Aid."

The reader may wonder, particularly in view of several references in this Introduction, why Ibsen is not represented in the main contents of the compilation. But my plan has been to include only complete, or fairly complete, essays; and unfortunately, Ibsen's appearances in what he calls "my capacity as state-satirist" are in the way of brief and scattered glimpses rather than in any sustained exposition. Yet no one else, save possibly Thoreau, pierces so directly to the heart of the matter,— as witness this final quotation:

"The State is the curse of the individual. With what is the strength of Prussia as a State bought? With the merging of the individual in the political and geographical concept. The waiter makes the best soldier. Now, turn to the Jewish nation, the nobility of the human race. How has it preserved itself — isolated, poetical — despite all the barbarity from without? Because it had no State to burden it. Had the Jewish nation remained in Palestine, it would long since have been ruined in the process of construction, like all the other nations. . . . The State has its roots in Time: it will have its culmination in Time. Greater things than it will fall; all religion will fall. Neither the conceptions of morality nor those of art are eternal. To how much are we really obliged to pin our faith? Who will vouch for it that two and two do not make five up in Jupiter?"

WALDO R. BROWNE

Digitized by Google

P. KROPOTKIN

(b. 1842)

THE STATE: ITS HISTORIC ROLE[1]

I

In taking as subject for this lecture the State and the part it has played in history I thought it would respond to a need which is greatly felt at this moment. It is of consequence, after having so often criticized the present State, to seek the cause of its appearance, to investigate the part played by it in the past, and to compare it with the institutions which it superseded.

Let us first agree as to what we mean by the word State.

There is, as you know, the German school that likes to confuse the State with *Society*. This confusion is to be met with even among the best German thinkers and many French ones, who cannot conceive of Society without State concentration. Yet to reason thus is entirely to ignore the progress made in the domain of history during the last thirty years; it is to ignore the fact that men have lived in societies during thousands of years before having known the State; it is to forget that for European nations the State is of recent origin — that it hardly dates from the sixteenth century; it is to fail to recognise that the most glorious epochs in humanity were those in which liberties and local life were not yet destroyed by the State, and when masses of men lived in communes and free federations.

[1] Published in 1898. The text used here is that of the edition issued in two-penny tract form from the office of "Freedom," London. It is evidently a translation from the French, poorly done and wretchedly printed; for the present purpose it has undergone careful and thorough revision. A few passages more particularly propagandistic than historical in substance, amounting altogether to perhaps one-seventh of the entire essay, are omitted here.

Digitized by Google

The State is but one of the forms taken by Society in the course of history. How can one be confused with the other?

On the other hand, the State has also been confused with *Government*. It seems to me, however, that State and Government represent two ideas of a different kind. The State idea implies quite another idea to that of Government. It not only includes the existence of a power placed above Society, but also a *territorial concentration* and a *concentration of many functions of the life of Society in the hands of a few or even of all.* It implies new relations among the members of society.

This characteristic distinction, which perhaps escapes notice at first sight, appears clearly when the origin of the State is studied.

Really to understand the State there is, in fact, but one way: it is to study it in its historical development, and that is what I am going to endeavor to do.

The Roman Empire was a State in the true sense of the word. To the present day it is the ideal of students of law. Its organs covered a vast domain with a close network. Everything flowed towards Rome, economic life, military life, judicial relations, riches, education, even religion. From Rome came laws, magistrates, legions to defend their territory, governors to rule the provinces, gods. The whole life of the Empire could be traced back to the Senate; later on to the Cæsar, the omnipotent and omniscient, the god of the Empire. Every province and every district had its miniature Capitol, its little share of Roman sovereignty to direct its whole life. One law, the law imposed by Rome, governed the Empire; and that Empire did not represent a confederation of citizens,— it was only a flock of *subjects*.

Even at present, the students of law and the authoritarians altogether admire the unity of that Empire, the spirit of unity of those laws, the beauty (they say), the harmony of that organisation.

But the internal decomposition furthered by barbarian invasion, the death of local life, henceforth unable to resist

Digitized by Google

attacks from without, and the gangrene spreading from the centre, pulled that Empire to pieces, and on its ruins was established and developed a new civilisation, which is ours to-day.

And if, putting aside antique empires, we study the origin and development of that young barbarian civilisation till the time when it gave birth to our modern States, we shall be able to grasp the essence of the State. We shall do it better than we should have done if we had launched ourselves into the study of the Roman Empire, of the empire of Alexander, or else of despotic Eastern monarchies.

In taking these powerful barbarian destroyers of the Roman Empire as a starting point, we can retrace the evolution of all civilisation from its origin till it reaches the stage of the State.

II

Most of the philosophers of the last century had conceived very elementary notions about the origin of societies.

At the beginning, they said, men lived in small, isolated families, and perpetual war among these families represented the normal condition of existence. But one fine day, perceiving the drawbacks of these endless struggles, they decided to form a society. A "social contract" was agreed upon among scattered families, who willingly submitted to an authority, which authority (need I tell you?) became the starting point and the initiative of all progress. Must I add, as you have already been told in school, that our present governments have ever since impersonated the noble rôle of salt of the earth, the pacifiers and civilisers of humanity?

This conception, which was born at a time when little was known about the origin of man, prevailed in the last century; and we must say that in the hands of the Encyclopædists and of Rousseau the idea of a "social contract" became a powerful weapon with which to fight royalty and divine right. Nevertheless, in spite of services it may have rendered in the past, that theory must now be recognised as false.

Digitized by Google

The fact is that all animals, save some beasts and birds of prey and a few species that are in course of extinction, live in societies. In the struggle for existence it is the sociable species that get the better of those that are not. In every class of animals the former occupy the top of the ladder, and there cannot be the least doubt that the first beings of human aspect already lived in societies. Man did not create society; society is anterior to man.

We also know to-day — anthropology has clearly demonstrated it — that the starting point of humanity was not the family but the clan, the tribe. The paternal family such as we have it, or such as it is depicted in Hebrew tradition, appeared only very much later. Men lived tens of thousands of years in the stage of clan or tribe, and during that first stage — let us call it primitive or savage tribe, if you will — man already developed a whole series of institutions, habits, and customs, far anterior to the paternal family institutions.

In those tribes the separate family existed no more than it exists among so many other sociable mammalia. Divisions in the midst of the tribe itself were formed by generations; and since the earliest periods of tribal life limitations were established to hinder marriage relations between different generations, while they were freely practiced between members of the same generation. Traces of that period are still extant in certain contemporary tribes, and we find them again in the language, customs, and superstitions of nations who were far more advanced in civilisation.

The whole tribe hunted and harvested in common, and when they were satisfied they gave themselves up with passion to their dramatic dances. Nowadays we still find tribes very near to this primitive phase, driven back to the outskirts of the large continents, or in Alpine regions, the least accessible of our globe.

The accumulation of private property could not take place, because each thing that had been the personal property of a member of the tribe was destroyed or burned on the spot where his corpse was buried. This is done even now by

Digitized by Google

gipsies in England, and the funeral rites of the "civilised" still bear its traces: the Chinese burn paper models of what the dead possessed; and we lead the military chief's horse, and carry his sword and decorations, as far as the grave. The meaning of the institution is lost; only the form survives.

Far from professing contempt for human life, these primitive individuals had a horror of blood and murder. Shedding blood was considered a deed of such gravity that each drop of blood shed — not only the blood of men, but also that of certain animals — required that the aggressor should lose an equal quantity of blood. In fact, a murder within the tribe was a deed absolutely unknown; it is so to this day among the Inoïts or Esquimaux — those survivors of the Stone Age that inhabit the Arctic regions. But when tribes of different origin, color, or tongue met during their migrations, war was often the result. It is true that already men had tried to mitigate the effect of these shocks. Even thus early, as has been so well demonstrated by Maine, Post, and Nys, the tribes agreed upon and respected certain rules and limitations of war, which contained the germs of what was to become international law later on. For example, a village was not to be attacked without warning to the inhabitants; and no one would have dared to kill on a path trodden by women going to the well.

However, from that time forward one general law overruled all others: "Your people have killed or wounded one of ours, therefore we have the right to kill one of yours, or to inflict an absolutely similar wound on one of yours" — never mind which, as it is always the tribe that is responsible for every act of its members. The well-known biblical verses, "Blood for blood, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a wound for a wound, a life for a life,"— but no more! — thence derive their origin, as was so well remarked by Koenigswarter. It was their conception of justice; and we have not much reason to boast, as the principle of "a life for a life" which prevails in our codes is but one of its numerous survivals.

As you see, a whole series of institutions, and many others

Digitized by Google

which I must pass over in silence,— a whole code of tribal morals,— was already elaborated during this primitive stage. And habit, custom, tradition sufficed to maintain this kernel of social customs in force; there was no authority to impose it.

Primitive individuals had, no doubt, temporary leaders. The sorcerer and the rain-maker (the scientist of that epoch) sought to profit by what they knew, or thought they knew, about nature, to rule over their fellow men. Likewise, he who could best remember proverbs and songs in which tradition was embodied became powerful. And, since then, these "educated" men have endeavored to secure their rulership by transmitting their knowledge only to the elect. All religions, and even all arts and crafts, have begun, as you know, by "mysteries." Also, the brave, the bold, and the cunning man became the temporary leader during conflicts with other tribes or during migrations. But an alliance between the "law bearer," the military chief, and the witch-doctor did not exist, and there can be no more question of a State with these tribes than there is in a society of bees or ants or among our contemporaries the Patagonians or Esquimaux.

This stage, however, lasted thousands upon thousands of years, and the barbarians who invaded the Roman Empire had just passed through it,— in fact, they had hardly emerged from it.

In the first centuries of our era, immense migrations took place among the tribes and confederations of tribes that inhabited Central and Northern Asia. A stream of people, driven by more or less civilised tribes, came down from the table-lands of Asia — probably driven away by the rapid drying-up of those plateaux —and inundated Europe, impelling one another onward, mingling with one another in their overflow towards the West.

During these migrations, when so many tribes of diverse origin were intermixed, the primitive tribe which still existed among them and the primitive inhabitants of Europe necessarily became disaggregated. The tribe was based on its common origin, on the worship of common ancestors.

Digitized by Google

But what common origin could be invoked by the agglomerations that emerged from the hurly-burly of migrations, collisions, wars between tribes, during which we see the paternal family spring up here and there — the kernel formed by some men appropriating women they had conquered or kidnapped from neighboring tribes?

Ancient ties were rent asunder, and under pain of a general break-up (that took place, in fact, for many a tribe, which then disappeared from history) it was essential that new ties should spring up. And they did spring up. They were found in the communal possession of *land* — of a territory, on which such an agglomeration ended by settling down.

The possession in common of a certain territory, of certain valleys, plains, or mountains, became the basis of a new agreement. Ancient gods had lost all meaning; and the local gods of a valley, river, or forest gave the religious consecration to the new agglomeration, substituting themselves for the gods of the primitive tribe. Later on, Christianity, always ready to accommodate itself to pagan survivals, made local saints of those gods.

Henceforth, the village community, composed partly or entirely of separate families — all united, nevertheless, by the possession in common of the land — became the necessary bond of union for centuries to come. On the immense stretches of land in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa, it still exists to-day. The barbarians who destroyed the Roman Empire — Scandinavians, Germans, Celts, Slavs, etc.— lived under this kind of organization. And in studying the ancient barbarian codes, as well as the laws and customs of the confederations of village communes among the Kabyles, Mongols, Hindoos, Africans, etc., which still exist, it becomes possible to reconstitute in its entirety that form of society which was the starting point of our present civilization.

Let us, therefore, cast a glance on that institution.

III

The village community was composed, as it still is, of separate families; but the families of a village possessed the

Digitized by Google

land in common. They looked upon the land as their common patrimony, and allotted it according to the size of the families. Hundreds of millions of men still live under this system in eastern Europe, India, Java, etc. It is the same system that Russian peasants have established nowadays, when the State left them free to occupy the immense Siberian territory as they thought best.

At first, also, the cultivation of the land was done in common, and this custom still obtains in many places — at least, the cultivation of certain plots of land. As to deforestation and clearings made in the woods, construction of bridges, building of forts and turrets which served as refuge in case of invasion, the work was done in common,— as it still is by hundreds of millions of peasants, wherever the village commune has resisted State encroachments. But consumption, to use a modern expression, already took place by family — each having its own cattle, kitchen garden, and provisions; the means of hoarding and transmitting wealth accumulated by inheritance already existed.

In all its business, the village commune was sovereign. Local custom was law, and the plenary council of all chiefs of families — men and women — was judge, the only judge, in civil and criminal affairs. When one of the inhabitants, complaining of another, planted his knife in the ground at the spot where the commune was wont to assemble, the commune had to "find the sentence" according to local custom, after the fact had been proved by the jurors of both litigant parties.

Time would fail me were I to tell you everything of interest presented by this stage. Suffice it for me to observe that *all* institutions which States took possession of later on for the benefit of minorities, all notions of right which we find in our codes (mutilated to the advantage of minorities), and all forms of judicial procedure, in as far as they offer guarantees to the individual, had their origin in the village community. Thus, when we imagine we have made great progress — in introducing the jury, for example,— we have only returned to the institution of the barbarians, after hav-

Digitized by Google

ing modified it to the advantage of the ruling classes. Roman law was only superposed upon customary law.

The sentiment of national unity was developing at the same time, by great free federations of village communes. Based on the possession and very often on the cultivation of the soil in common, sovereign as judge and legislator of customary law, the village community satisfied most needs of the social being. But not all his needs,— there were still others to be satisfied. However, the spirit of the age was not for calling upon a government as soon as a new need was felt. It was, on the contrary, to take the initiative oneself, to unite, to league, to federate, to create an understanding, great or small, numerous or restricted, which would correspond to the new need. And society at that time was literally covered, as by a network, with sworn fraternities, guilds for mutual suport, "con-jurations," within and without the village, and in the federation.

We can observe this stage and spirit at work even to-day, among many a barbarian federation having remained outside modern States modelled on the Roman or rather the Byzantine type. Thus, to take an example among many others, the Kabyles have retained their village community with the powers I have just mentioned. But man feels the necessity of action outside the narrow limits of his hamlet. Some like to wander about in quest of adventure, in the capacity of merchants. Some take to a craft, "an art," of some kind. And these merchants and artisans unite in "fraternities," even when they belong to different villages, tribes, and confederations. There must be union for mutual help in distant adventures or mutually to transmit the mysteries of the craft, and they unite. They swear brotherhood, and practice it — not in words only, but in deeds.

Besides, misfortune can overtake anyone. Who knows that to-morrow, perhaps, in a brawl, a man gentle and peaceful as a rule will not exceed the established limits of good behavior and sociability? Very heavy compensation will then have to be paid to the insulted or wounded; the aggressor will have to defend himself before the village council and

Digitized by Google

prove facts on the oath of six, ten, or twelve "con-jurors." This is another reason for belonging to a fraternity.

Moreover, man feels the necessity of talking politics and perhaps even intriguing, the necessity of propagating some moral opinion or custom. There is, also, external peace to be safeguarded; there are alliances to be concluded with other tribes, federations to be constituted far off, the idea of intertribal law to be propagated. Well, then, to satisfy all these needs of an emotional and intellectual kind the Kabyles, the Mongols, the Malays do not turn to a government: they have none. Men of customary law and individual initiative, they have not been perverted by the corrupted idea of a government and a church supposed to do everything. They unite directly. They constitute sworn fraternities, political and religious societies, unions of crafts — *guilds* as they were called in the Middle Ages, *çofs* as the Kabyles call them to-day. And these *çofs* go beyond the boundaries of hamlets: they flourish far out in the desert and in foreign cities; and fraternity is practiced in these unions. To refuse to help a member of your *çof*, even at the risk of losing all your belongings and your life, is an act of treason to the fraternity, and exposes the traitor to be treated as the murderer of a "brother."

What we find to-day among Kabyles, Mongols, Malays, etc., was the very essence of life of the so-called barbarians in Europe from the fifth to the twelfth centuries, even till the fifteenth. Under the name of guilds, friendships, *universitates*, etc., unions swarmed for mutual defence and for solidarily avenging offences against each member of the union; for substituting compensation instead of the vengeance of "an eye for an eye," followed by the reception of the aggressor into the fraternity; for the exercise of crafts, for helping in case of illness, for the defence of territory, for resisting the encroachments of nascent authority, for commerce, for the practice of "good-neighborship," for propaganda,— for everything, in a word, that the European, educated by the Rome of the Cæsars and the Popes, asks of the State to-day. It is even very doubtful if there existed at that time one single man, free or serf, (save those who were

Digitized by Google

outlawed by their own fraternities) who did not belong to some fraternity or guild, besides his commune.

Scandinavian sagas sing their exploits. The devotion of sworn brothers is the theme of the most beautiful of these epical songs; whereas the Church and the rising kings, representatives of Byzantine or Roman law which reappears, hurl against them their anathemas and decrees, which happily remain a dead letter.

The whole history of that period loses its significance, and becomes absolutely incomprehensible, if we do not take the fraternities into account — these unions of brothers and sisters that spring up everywhere to satisfy the multiple needs of both the economic and the emotional life of man.

Nevertheless black spots accumulated on the horizon. Other unions — those of ruling minorities — are also formed; and they endeavor, little by little, to transform these free men into serfs, into subjects. Rome is dead, but its tradition revives; and the Christian Church, haunted by Oriental theocratic visions, gives its powerful support to the new powers that are seeking to constitute themselves.

Far from being the sanguinary beast that he is represented to be in order to prove the necessity of ruling over him, man has always loved tranquillity and peace. He fights rather by necessity than by ferocity, and prefers his cattle and his land to the profession of arms. Therefore, hardly had the great migration of barbarians begun to abate, hardly had hordes and tribes more or less cantoned themselves on their respective lands, than we see the care of the defence of territory against new waves of immigrants confided to a man who engages a small band of adventurers, men hardened in wars, or brigands, to be his followers; while the great mass raises cattle or cultivates the soil. And this defender soon begins to amass wealth. He gives a horse and armor (very dear at that time) to the poor man, and reduces him to servitude; he begins to conquer the germ of military power. On the other hand, little by little, tradition, which constituted law in those times, is forgotten by the masses. There remains only an occasional old man who keeps in his memory the

Digitized by Google

verses and songs which tell of the "precedents" of which customary law consists, and recites them on great festival days before the commune. And little by little some families made a specialty, transmitted from father to son, of retaining these songs and verses in their memory and of preserving "the law" in its purity. To them villagers apply for judgment of differences in intricate cases, especially when two villages or confederations refuse to accept the decisions of arbitrators taken from their midst.

The germ of princely or royal authority is already sown in these families; and the more I study the institutions of that time, the more I see that the knowledge of customary law did far more to constitute that authority than the power of the sword. Man allowed himself to be enslaved far more by his desire to "punish according to law" than by direct military conquest.

And gradually the first "concentration of powers," the first mutual insurance for domination — that of the judge and the military chief — grew up to the detriment of the village commune. A single man assumed these two functions. He surrounded himself with armed men to put his judicial decisions into execution; he fortified himself in his turret; he accumulated the wealth of the epoch, viz., bread, cattle, and iron, for his family; and little by little he forced his rule upon the neighboring peasants. The scientific man of the age, that is to say the witch-doctor or priest, lost no time in bringing his support and in sharing the chief's domination; or else, adding the sword to his power of redoubtable magician, he seized the domination for his own account.

A course of lectures, rather than a simple lecture, would be needed to deal thoroughly with this subject, so full of new teachings, and to tell how free men gradually became serfs, forced to work for the lay or clerical lord of the manor; how authority was constituted, in a tentative way, over villages and boroughs; how peasants leagued, revolted, struggled, to fight the advancing domination, and how they succumbed in those struggles against the strong castle walls and the men in armor who defended them.

Digitized by Google

Suffice it for me to say that during the tenth and eleventh centuries Europe seemed to be drifting straight towards the constitution of those barbarous kingdoms such as we now discover in the heart of Africa, or those Eastern theocracies which we know through history. This could not take place in a day; but the germs of those little kingdoms and those little theocracies were already there and were developing more and more.

Happily, the "barbarian" spirit — Scandinavian, Saxon, Celt, German, Slav — that had led men during seven or eight centuries to seek for the satisfaction of their needs in individual initiative and in free agreement of fraternities and guilds, happily that spirit still lived in the villages and boroughs. The barbarians allowed themselves to be enslaved, they worked for a master; but their spirit of free action and free agreement was not yet corrupted. Their fraternities flourished more than ever, and the Crusades had but roused and developed them in the West.

Then the revolution of the commune, long since prepared by that federative spirit and born of the union of sworn fraternity with the village community, burst forth in the twelfth century with a striking spontaneity all over Europe.

This revolution, which the mass of university historians prefer to ignore, saved Europe from the calamity with which it was menaced. It arrested the evolution of theocratic and despotic monarchies, in which our civilisation would probably have gone down after a few centuries of pompous expansion, as the civilisation of Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Babylon had done. This revolution opened up a new phase of life, that of the free communes.

IV

It is easy to understand why modern historians, nurtured as they are in the spirit of the Roman law, and accustomed to look to Roman law for the origin of every political institution, are incapable of understanding the spirit of the communalist movement of the twelfth century. This manly affirmation of the rights of the individual, who managed to

Digitized by Google

constitute Society through the federation of individuals, villages, and towns, was an absolute negation of that centralising spirit of ancient Rome which penetrates all historical conceptions of present-day university teaching.

The uprising of the twelfth century cannot even be attributed to any personality of mark, or to any central institution. It is a natural, anthropological phasis of human development; and, as such, it belongs to human evolution, like the tribe and the village-community periods, but to no nation in particular, to no special region of Europe, and it is the work of no special hero.

This is why university science, which is based upon Roman law, centralisation, and hero-worship, is absolutely incapable of understanding the substance of that movement, which came from beneath. In France, Augustin Thierry and Sismondi, who both wrote in the first half of this century and who had really understood that period, have had no followers up to the present time; and now only M. Lachaire timidly tries to follow the lines of research indicated by the great historian of the Merovingian and the communalist period (Augustin Thierry). This is why, in Germany, the awakening of studies of this period and a vague comprehension of its spirit are only just now coming to the front. And this is why, in England, one finds a true comprehension of the twelfth century in the poet William Morris rather than amongst the historians,— Green (in the later part of his life) having been the only one who was capable of understanding it at all.

The commune of the Middle Ages takes its origin, on the one hand, from the village community, on the other from those thousands of fraternities and guilds which were constituted outside territorial unions. It was a federation of these two kinds of unions, developed under the protection of the fortified enclosure and the turrets of the city.

In many a region it was a natural growth. Elsewhere — and this is the rule in Western Europe — it was the result of a revolution. When the inhabitants of a borough felt themselves sufficiently protected by their walls, they made a "con-juration." They mutually took the oath to put aside

Digitized by Google

all pending questions concerning feuds arisen from insults, assaults, or wounds, and they swore that henceforth in the quarrels that should arise they would never again have recourse to personal revenge or to a judge other than the syndics nominated by themselves in the guild and the city.

This was long since the regular practice in every art or good-neighborship guild, in every sworn fraternity. In every village commune such had formerly been the custom, before bishop or kinglet had succeeded in introducing — and later in enforcing — his judge. Now the hamlets and the parishes which constituted the borough, as well as all the guilds and fraternities that had developed there, considered themselves a single *amitas*. They named their judges and swore permanent union between all these groups.

A charter was hastily drawn up and accepted. In case of need they sent for the copy of a charter from some small neighboring commune (we know hundreds of these charters to-day), and the commune was constituted. The bishop or prince, who had up till then been judge of the commune and had often become more or less its master, had only to recognize the accomplished fact, or else to fight the young "conjuration" by force of arms. Often the king — that is to say, the prince who tried to gain superiority over other princes, and whose coffers were always empty —"granted" the charter, for ready money. He thus renounced imposing *his* judge on the commune, while giving himself importance before other feudal lords. But this was in nowise the rule: hundreds of communes lived without any other sanction than their own good pleasure, their ramparts, and their lances.

In a hundred years this movement spread, with striking unity, to the whole of Europe,— by imitation, observe well, — including Scotland, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Russia. And to-day, when we compare the charters and internal organisations of French, English, Scotch, Irish, Scandinavian, German, Bohemian, Russian, Swiss, Italian, and Spanish communes, we are struck with the almost complete sameness of these charters and of the organisation which grew up under the shelter

Digitized by Google

of these "social contracts." What a striking lesson for Romanists and Hegelists who know no other means to obtain a similarity of institutions than servitude before the law!

From the Atlantic to the middle course of the Volga, and from Norway to Italy, Europe was covered with similar communes — some becoming populous cities like Florence, Venice, Nuremberg, or Novgorod, others remaining boroughs of a hundred or even twenty families, but nevertheless treated as equals by their more or less prosperous sisters.

Organisms full of vigor, the communes evidently grew dissimilar in their evolution. Geographical position, the character of external commerce, the obstacles to be vanquished outside, gave every commune its own history. But for all, the principle was the same. Pskov in Russia and Brugge in Flanders, a Scotch borough of three hundred inhabitants and rich Venice with its islands, a borough in the North of France or in Poland and Florence the Beautiful represent the same *amitas*,— the same fellowship of village communes and of associated guilds, the same constitution in its general outline.

Generally, the town, whose enclosure grows in length and breadth with the population and surrounds itself with higher and higher towers, each tower erected by such and such a parish or such a guild and having its own individual character, — generally, I say, the town is divided into four, five, or six districts or sections, which radiate from the citadel to the ramparts. In preference each of these districts is inhabited by one "art" or craft, whereas new trades — the "young arts"— occupy the suburbs, which will soon be enclosed in a new fortified circle.

The street, or parish, represents a territorial unit, corresponding to the ancient village community. Each street or parish has its popular assembly, its forum, its popular tribunal, its elected priest, militia, banner, and often its seal as a symbol of sovereignty. It is federated with other streets, but it nevertheless keeps its independence.

The professional unit, which often corresponds, or nearly

Digitized by Google

so, with the district or section, is the guild — the trade union. This union also retains its saints, its assembly, its forum, its judges. It has its treasury, its landed property, its militia and banner. It also has its seal, and it remains sovereign. In case of war, should it think right, its militia will march and join forces with those of other guilds, and it will plant its banner side by side with the great banner, or *carosse* (cart), of the city.

And lastly, the city is the union of districts, streets, parishes, and guilds, and it has its plenary assembly of all inhabitants in the large forum, its great belfry, its elected judges, its banner for rallying the militia of the guilds and districts. It negotiates as a sovereign with other cities, federates with whom it likes, concludes national and foreign alliances. Thus the English "Cinque Ports" around Dover are federated with French and Netherland ports on the other side of the Channel; the Russian Novgorod is the ally of Scandinavian, Germanic Hansa, and so on. In its external relations, every city possesses all the prerogatives of the modern State; and from that time forth is constituted, by free contracts, that body of agreements which later on became known as International Law, and was placed under the sanction of public opinion of all cities, while later on it was more often violated than respected by the States.

How often a city, not being able to decide a dispute in a complicated case, sends for "finding the sentence" to a neighboring city! How often the ruling spirit of the time — arbitration, rather than the judge's authority — is manifested in the fact of two communities taking a third as arbitrator!

Trade unions behave in the same way. They carry on their commercial and trade affairs beyond the cities and make treaties, without taking their nationalities into account. And when, in our ignorance, we talk boastingly of our international workers' congresses we forget that international trade congresses and even apprentices' congresses were already held in the fifteenth century.

Digitized by Google

Lastly, the city either defends itself against aggressors and wages its own stubborn wars against neighboring feudal lords, nominating each year one or rather two military commanders of its militias, or else accepting a "military defender"— a prince or duke — who is chosen by the city for a year, and whom it can dismiss when it pleases. It usually delivers up to this military defender the produce of judicial fines for the maintenance of his soldiers; but it forbids him to interfere with the business of the city. Or lastly, too feeble to emancipate itself entirely from its neighbors, the feudal vultures, the city will retain, as a more or less permanent military protector, a bishop or a prince of some family — Guelf or Ghibelline in Italy, from the family of Rurik in Russia or of Olgerd in Lithuania. But it will watch with jealousy that the bishop's or prince's authority shall not extend beyond the soldiers encamped in the castle. It will even forbid them to enter the town without permission. You no doubt know that even at the present day the Queen of England cannot enter the City of London without the Lord Mayor's permission.

I should like to speak to you at length about the economic life of cities in the Middle Ages; but I am obliged to pass it over in silence. It was so varied that it would need rather full development. Suffice it to remark that internal commerce was always carried on by the guilds, not by isolated artisans, the prices being fixed by mutual agreement; that at the beginning of that period, external commerce was carried on *exclusively* by the city; that commerce only became the monopoly of the merchants' guild later on, and still later of isolated individuals; that never was any work done on Sunday, or on Saturday afternoon (bathing day); lastly, that the city purchased the chief necessaries for the life of its inhabitants — corn, coal, etc.— and delivered these to the inhabitants at cost price. (This custom of the city making purchases of grain was retained in Switzerland till the middle of our century.) In fact, it is proved by a mass of documents of all kinds that humanity has never known, either before or after, a period of relative well-being as perfectly

Digitized by Google

assured to all as existed in the cities of the Middle Ages. The present poverty, insecurity, and over-work were absolutely unknown then.

V

With these elements — liberty, organisation from simple to complex, production and exchange by trade unions (guilds), commerce with foreign parts carried on by the city itself, and the buying of main provisions by the city — with these elements, the towns of the Middle Ages, during the first two centuries of their free life, became centres of well-being for all the inhabitants. They were centres of opulence and civilization such as we have not seen since.

Consult documents that allow of establishing the rates of wages for work in comparison with the price of provisions (Rogers has done it for England and a great number of writers have done it for Germany) and you will see that the work of the artisan, and even of a simple day-laborer, was remunerated at that time by a wage not even reached by skilled workmen nowadays. The account-books of the University of Oxford and of certain English estates, also those of a great number of German and Swiss towns, are there to testify to this.

On the other hand, consider the artistic finish and the quantity of decorative work which a workman of those days used to put into the beautiful work of art he did, as well as into the simplest thing of domestic life,— a railing, a candlestick, an article of pottery,— and you see at once that he did not know the pressure, the hurry, the overwork of our times. He could forge, sculpture, weave, embroider at his leisure, as but a very small number of artist-workers can do nowadays. And if we glance over the donations to the churches and to houses which belonged to the parish, to the guild, or to the city, be it in works of art — in decorative panels, sculptures, cast or wrought iron and even silver work — or in simple mason's or carpenter's work, we understand what degree of well-being those cities had realized in their midst. We can conceive the spirit of research and invention that prevailed,

Digitized by Google

the breath of liberty that inspired their works, the sentiment of fraternal solidarity that grew up in those guilds in which men of the same craft were united not only by the mercantile and technical side of a trade but also by bonds of sociability and fraternity. Was it not, in fact, the guild-law that two brothers were to watch at the bedside of every sick brother; and that the guild would take care of burying the dead brother or sister — a custom which called for devotion, in those times of contagious diseases and plagues,— follow him to the grave, and take care of his widow and children?

Black misery, depression, the uncertainty of to-morrow for the greater number, which characterize our modern cities, were absolutely unknown in those "oases sprung up in the twelfth century in the middle of the feudal forest." In those cities, under the shelter of their liberties acquired through the impulse of free agreement and free initiative, a whole new civilization grew up and attained such expansion that the like has not been seen since.

All modern industry comes to us from those cities. In three centuries, industries and arts developed there to such perfection that our century has been able to surpass them only in rapidity of production, but rarely in quality and very rarely in beauty of the produce. In the higher arts, which we try in vain to revive to-day, have we surpassed the beauty of Raphael, the vigor and audacity of Michel Angelo, the science and art of Leonardo da Vinci, the poetry and language of Dante, or the architecture to which we owe the cathedrals of Laon, Rheims, Cologne ("the people were its masons" Victor Hugo has said so well), the treasures of beauty of Florence and Venice, the town halls of Bremen and Prague, the towers of Nuremberg and Pisa, and so on *ad infinitum*? All these great conquests of art were the product of that period.

Do you wish to measure the progress of that civilization at a glance? Compare the dome of St. Mark in Venice to the rustic arch of the Normans, Raphael's picture to the naïve embroideries and carpets of Bayeux, the mathematical and physical instruments and clocks of Nuremberg to the sand

Digitized by Google

clocks of the preceding centuries, Dante's sonorous language to the barbarous Latin of the tenth century. A new world has opened up between the two!

Never, with the exception of that other glorious period of ancient Greece (free cities again) had humanity made such a stride forward. Never, in two or three centuries, had man undergone so profound a change or so extended his power over the forces of nature.

You may perhaps think of the progress of civilization in our own century, which is ceaselessly boasted of. But in each of its manifestations it is but the child of the civilization which grew up in the midst of free communes. All the great discoveries which have made modern science,— the compass, the clock, the watch, printing, the maritime discoveries, gunpowder, the law of gravitation, the law of atmospheric pressure of which the steam-engine is but a development, the rudiments of chemistry, the scientific method already pointed out by Roger Bacon and practised in Italian universities,— where do all these come from, if not from the free cities which developed under the shelter of communal liberties?

But you may say, perhaps, that I forget the conflicts, the internal struggles, of which the history of these communes is full,— the street tumults, the ferocious battles sustained against the landlords, the insurrections of "young arts" against the "ancient arts," the blood that was shed and the reprisals which took place in these struggles.

I forget nothing. But, like Leo and Botta, the two historians of mediæval Italy, like Sismondi, like Ferrari, Gino Capponi, and so many others, I see that these struggles were the guarantee itself of free life in a free city. I perceive a renewal of and a new flight towards progress after each one of these struggles. After describing these struggles and conflicts in detail, and after measuring the immensity of progress realized while these struggles stained the streets with blood,— the well-being assured to all the inhabitants, and the renovation of civilization,— Leo and Botta conclude with this thought, so true, which often comes to my mind:

Digitized by Google

"A commune only then represents the picture of a moral whole, only then appears universal in its behavior, like the human mind itself, *when it has admitted conflict and opposition in its midst.*"

Yes, conflict, freely thrashed out, without an external power, the State, throwing its immense weight into the balance, in favor of one of the struggling forces.

Like those two authors, I also think that "far more misery has often been caused by imposing peace, because in such cases contradictory things were forcibly allied in order to create a general politic order, and by sacrificing individualities and little organisms in order to absorb them in a vast body without color and without life."

This is why the communes — as long as they themselves did not strive to become States and to impose submission around them, so as to create "a vast body without color or life" — always grew up, always came out younger and stronger after every struggle; this is why they flourished at the sound of arms in the street, while two centuries later that same civilization was crumbling at the noise of wars brought about by States.

In the commune, the struggle was for the conquest and maintenance of the liberty of the individual, for the principle of federation, for the right to unite and act; whereas the wars of the States aimed to destroy these liberties, to subjugate the individual, to annihilate free agreement, to unite men in one and the same servitude before the king, the judge, the priest, and the State.

There lies all the difference. There are struggles and conflicts that kill, and there are those that launch humanity forwards.

VI

In the course of the sixteenth century, modern barbarians come and destroy the whole civilization of the cities of the Middle Ages. These barbarians do not completely annihilate it; they cannot do so, but at least they check it in its progress for two or three centuries. They drive it in a new direction.

They fetter the individual, they take all his liberties

Digitized by Google

away, they order him to forget the unions which formerly were based on free initiative and free agreement, and their aim is to level the whole of society in the same submission to the master. They destroy all bonds between men, by declaring that State and Church alone must henceforth constitute the union between the subjects of a State — that only Church and State have the mission of watching over industrial, commercial, judiciary, artistic, and passional interests, for which men of the twelfth century had been wont to unite directly.

And who are those barbarians? It is the State,— the Triple Alliance, constituted at last, of the military chief, the Roman judge, and the priest, the three forming a mutual insurance for domination; the three united in one power that will command in the name of the interests of society and will crush that society.

We naturally ask ourselves how these new barbarians could get the mastery over communes, formerly so powerful. Whence did they get their strength for conquest?

That strength they first of all found in the village. As the communes of ancient Greece did not manage to abolish slavery, so the communes of the Middle Ages were not able to emancipate the peasant from serfdom at the same time that they emancipated the citizen.

It is true that nearly everywhere, at the time of his emancipation, the citizen — himself an artisan-cultivator — had tried to induce the country folk to help in his enfranchisement. Durng two centuries, the citizens of Italy, Spain, and Germany carried on a stubborn war against feudal lords. Prodigies of heroism and perseverance were displayed by citizens in that war against the feudal castles. They exhausted themselves to become masters of the castles of feudalism and to cut down the feudal forest that enveloped them.

But they only half succeeded. Then, tired of war, they made peace over the head of the peasant. To buy peace they delivered the peasant up to the lord, outside the territory conquered by the commune. In Italy and Germany they even ended by recognizing the lord as fellow citizen on con-

Digitized by Google

dition that he should reside within the commune; in other parts they ended by sharing his domination over the peasant. And the lord avenged himself on these common people, whom he hated and despised, by drenching their streets in blood during the struggles of noble families and acts of revenge that were not carried before communal judges and syndics, whom the nobles despised, but were settled by the sword in the street.

The nobles demoralised the towns by their munificence, their intrigues, their great style of living, by their education received at the bishop's or the king's court. They made the citizens espouse their family struggles. And the citizen ended by imitating the lord, and became a lord in his turn, enriching himself, he too, by the labor of serfs encamped in the villages outside the city walls. After which the peasant lent assistance to nascent kings, emperors, tsars, and popes, when they began to build their kingdoms and to bring the towns under subjection. When not marching by their orders, the peasant left them free to act.

It is in the country, in fortified castles, situated in the midst of rural populations, that royalty was slowly constituted. In the twelfth century it existed but in name, and to-day we know what to think of the rogues, chiefs of little bands of brigands, who adorned themselves with the title of king, which after all (as Augustin Thierry has so well demonstrated) had very little meaning at that time; in fact, the Norse fishermen had their "Nets' Kings," and even the beggars had their "Kings"— the word having then simply the signification of "temporary leader."

Slowly, tentatively, a baron more powerful or more cunning than the others succeeded here and there in rising above the rest. The Church no doubt bestirred itself to support him. And by force, cunning, money, sword, and even poison in case of need, one of these feudal barons would become great at the expense of the others. But it was never in the free cities, which had their noisy forum, their Tarpeian rock, or their river for the tyrants, that royal authority succeeded in constituting itself; it was always in the country, in the village.

Digitized by Google

After having vainly tried to constitute this authority in Rheims or in Lyons, it was established in Paris,— an agglomeration of villages and boroughs surrounded by a rich country, which had not yet known the life of free cities; it was established in Westminster, at the gates of populous London City; it was established in the Kremlin, built in the midst of rich villages on the banks of the Moskva, after having failed at Souzdal and Vladimir. But never in Novgorod or Pskov, in Nuremberg or Florence, could royal authority be consolidated.

The neighboring peasants supplied them with grain, horses, and men; and commerce — royal, not communal — increased the wealth of the growing tyrants. The Church looked after their interests. It protected them, came to their succour with its treasure chests; it invented a saint and miracles for their royal town. It encircled with its veneration Notre-Dame of Paris or the Virgin of Iberia at Moscow. And while the civilization of free cities, emancipated from the bishops, took its youthful bound, the Church worked steadily to reconstitute its authority by the intermediary of nascent royalty; it surrounded with its tender care, its incense, and its ducats, the family cradle of the one whom it had finally chosen, in order to rebuild with him, and through him, the ecclesiastical authority. In Paris, Moscow, Madrid, and Prague you see the Church bending over the royal cradle, a lighted torch in its hand.

Hard at work, strong in its State education, leaning on the man of will or cunning whom it sought out in any class of society, learned in intrigue as well as in Roman and Byzantine law, you see the Church marching without respite towards its ideal: the Hebrew King, absolute, but obeying the high priest — the simple secular arm of ecclesiastical power.

In the sixteenth century the long work of the two conspirators is already in force. A king already rules over the barons, his rivals, and that force will alight on the free cities to crush them in their turn.

Besides, the towns of the sixteenth century were not what they were in the twelfth, thirteenth, or fourteenth centuries. They were born out of libertarian revolution. But they

Digitized by Google

had not the courage to extend their ideas of equality, either to the neighboring rural districts or even to those citizens who had later on established themselves in their enclosures, refuges of liberty, there to create industrial arts. A distinction between the *old* families who had made the revolution of the twelfth century — or curtly, "the families"— and the others who established themselves later on in the city, is to be met with in all towns. The old "Merchant Guild" had no desire to receive the new-comers. It refused to incorporate the "young arts" for commerce. And from simple clerk of the city it became the go-between, the intermediary, who enriched itself by distant commerce, and who imported oriental ostentation. Later on the "Merchant Guild" allied itself to the lord and the priest, or it went and sought the support of the nascent king, to maintain its monopoly, its right to enrichment. Having thus become personal instead of communal, commerce killed the free city.

Besides, the guilds of ancient trades, of which the city and its government were composed at the outset, would not recognise the same rights to the young guilds, formed later on by the younger trades. These had to conquer their rights by a revolution. And that is what they did everywhere. But while that revolution became, in most large cities, the starting of a renewal of life and arts (this is well seen in Florence), in other cities it ended in the victory of the richer orders over the poorer ones — of the "fat people" (*popolo grasso*) over the "low people" (*popolo basso*) — in a despotic crushing of the masses, in numberless transportations and executions, especially when lords and priests took part in it.

And — need we say it? — it was "the defence of the poorer orders" that the king, who had received Macchiavelli's lessons, took later on as a pretext when he came to knock at the gates of the free cities!

And then the cities had to die, because the ideas themselves of men had changed. The teaching of canonical and Roman law had perverted them.

The European of the twelfth century was essentially a federalist,— a man of free initiative, of free agreement, of

Digitized by Google

unions freely consented to. He saw in the individual the starting point of all society. He did not seek salvation in obedience; he did not ask for a savior of society. The idea of Christian or Roman discipline was unknown to him.

But under the influence of the Christian Church, always fond of authority, always zealous to impose its rule on the souls and especially on the arms of the faithful; and on the other hand, under the influence of Roman law, which already, since the twelfth century, invaded the courts of the powerful lords, the kings, and the popes, and soon became a favorite study in the universities,— under the influence of these two teachings, which agreed so well although they were enemies at the beginning, the minds of men grew depraved in proportion as priest and legist triumphed.

Men became enamored of authority. If a revolution of the lower trades was accomplished in a commune, the commune called in a savior. It gave itself a dictator, a municipal Cæsar, and it endowed him with full powers to exterminate the opposite party. And the dictator profited by it, with all the refinement of cruelty that the Church or the examples which were brought from the despotic kingdoms of the East inspired him with.

The Church, of course, supported that Cæsar. Had it not always dreamt of the biblical king, who kneels before the high priest and is his docile tool? Had it not, with all its might, hated the ideas of rationalism which inspired the free towns during the first Renaissance,— that of the twelfth century,— as also those "pagan" ideas which brought man back to Nature under the influence of the rediscovery of Greek civilisation; as also, later on, those ideas which in the name of primitive Christianity incited men against the pope, the priest, and faith in general? Fire, wheel, gibbet — these weapons so dear to the Church in all times — were put into play against those heretics. And whoever was the tool,— pope, king, or dictator,— it was of little importance to the Church, so long as the wheel and the gibbet worked against heretics.

And under the twofold teaching of the Roman legist and the priest, the old federalist spirit, the spirit of free initiative and free agreement, was dying out to make room for the

Digitized by Google

spirit of discipline, organisation, and pyramidal authority. The rich and the poor alike asked for a savior.

And when the savior presented himself,— when the king, who had become enriched far from the forum's tumult, in some town of his creation, leaning on the wealthy Church, and followed by vanquished nobles and peasants,— when the king knocked at the city gates, promising the "lower orders" his mighty protection against the rich and the obedient rich his protection against the revolting poor, then the towns, which themselves were already undermined by the canker of authority, had no longer the strength to resist. They opened their gates to the king.

And then the Mongols had conquered and devastated eastern Europe in the thirteenth century, and an empire was springing up out there in Moscow, under the protection of the Tartar Khans and the Russian Christian Church. The Turks had come and settled in Europe, and pushed as far as Vienna in 1453, devastating everything on their path; and powerful States were being constituted in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and in the centre of Europe. While at the other extremity, the war of extermination against the Moors in Spain allowed of another powerful empire to constitute itself in Castille and Aragon, supported by the Roman Church and the Inquisition — the sword and the stake.

As the communes themselves were becoming little States, these little States were inevitably doomed to be swallowed up by the big ones.

VII

The victory of the State over the communes and the federalist institutions of the Middle Ages did not take place straightway. At one time the State was so threatened that its victory seemed doubtful.

A great popular movement, religious in form and expression, but eminently communistic in its aspirations and striving at equality, originated in the towns and rural parts of central Europe.

Digitized by Google

Already in the fourteenth century (in 1358 in France and 1381 in England) two great similar movements had taken place. Two powerful revolts, that of the Jacquerie and that of Wat Tyler, had shaken society to its foundations. Both, however, had been principally directed against the feudal lords. Both were defeated; but the peasant revolt in England completely put an end to serfdom, and the Jacquerie in France so checked it in its development that henceforth the institution of serfdom could only vegetate, without ever attaining the development it subsequently attained in Germany and in eastern Europe.

Now, in the sixteenth century a similar movement took place in central Europe. Under the name of "Hussite" in Bohemia, "Anabaptist" in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, and of "Troubled Times" in Russia (at the beginning of the next century), it was over and above a struggle against feudal lords — it was a complete revolt against Church and State, against Canonic and Roman law, in the name of primitive Christianity.

This movement, which is only just beginning to be understood, was for many years travestied by State and ecclesiastical historians.

The absolute liberty of the individual — who must only obey the commandments of his conscience — and Communism were the watchwords of this revolt. And it was only later, when Church and State succeeded in exterminating its most ardent defenders, and juggled with it to their own profit, that this movement, diminished and deprived of its revolutionary character, became Luther's Reformation.

It began by Communist Anarchism, preached and in some places practised. And if we set aside the religious formulæ, which are a tribute to that epoch, we find in it the very essence of the current of ideas which Anarchism represents today: the negation of all law, State or divine, the conscience of each individual being his one and only law; the commune, absolute master of its destinies, retaking its lands from feudal lords, and refusing all personal or monetary service to the State; in fact, Communism and equality put into prac-

Digitized by Google

tice. Moreover, when Denck, one of the philosophers of the Anabaptist movement, was asked if he did not at least recognise the authority of the Bible, he answered that the only obligatory rule of conduct is the one that each individual finds, *for himself,* in the Bible. And yet these very formulæ, so vague, borrowed from ecclesiastical slang, this authority of "the book" from which it is so easy to borrow arguments for and against Communism, for and against authority, and so uncertain when it comes clearly to define what liberty is, these very religious tendencies of the revolt,— did they not already contain the germ of an unavoidable defeat?

Originating in towns, the movement soon spread to the country. The peasants refused to obey anybody, and planting an old shoe on a pike by way of a flag they took back the lands which the lords had seized from the village communities; they broke their bonds of serfdom, drove away priest and judge, and constituted themselves into free communes. And it was only by the stake, the wheel, and the gibbet, it was only by the massacre of more than a hundred thousand peasants in a few years, that royal or imperial power, allied to the papal or reformed church (Luther inciting to massacre peasants more violently even than the Pope), put an end to these risings that had for a moment threatened the constitution of nascent States.

Born of popular Anabaptism, the Lutheran Reformation, leaning on the State, massacred the people and crushed the movement from which it originally had derived its strength. The survivors of this immense wave of thought took refuge in the communities of the "Moravian Brothers," who, in their turn, were destroyed by Church and State. Those among them who were not exterminated sought shelter, some in the south-east of Russia, others in Greenland, where to this day they have been able to live in communities and to refuse all service to the State.

Henceforth, the State's existence was secure. The lawyer, the priest, and the soldier-lord, having constituted a solid alliance around the thrones, could carry on their work of annihilation.

Digitized by Google

Have we not all learned at school that the State rendered great service in constituting national unions on the ruins of feudal society,— unions made impracticable in earlier times by the rivalry of cities? We have all learned it in school and we have all believed it in manhood.

And nevertheless to-day we learn that, in spite of all rivalries, mediæval cities had already worked during four centuries to constitute these unions by federation, freely consented to, and that they had fully succeeded in that work of consolidation.

The Lombard Union, for example, included the cities of upper Italy and had its federal treasury in safe keeping in Genoa and Venice. Other federations, such as the Tuscan Union, the Rhenan Union (comprising sixty towns), the federations of Westphalia, of Bohemia, of Servia, of Poland, and of Russian towns, covered Europe. At the same time, the commercial union of the Hansa included Scandinavian, German, Polish, and Russian towns throughout the basin of the Baltic.

All the elements, as well as the fact itself, of large human agglomerations, freely constituted, were there already.

Do you wish for a living proof of these groups? You have it in Switzerland. There the union asserted itself first between village communes (the old cantons), in the same way that it was constituted in France in the Laonnais. And as in Switzerland the separation between town and village was never so great as it was for towns carrying on an extensive and distant commerce, the Swiss towns lent a hand to the peasant insurrections of the sixteenth century, and the union encompassed both towns and villages and constituted a federation that still exists to-day.

But the State, by its very essence, cannot tolerate free federation; because the latter represents that nightmare of the legist, "the State within the State." The State does not recognize a freely adopted union working within itself. It only deals with *subjects*. The State alone, and its prop the Church, arrogate to themselves the right of being the connecting link between men.

Consequently the State must perforce annihilate cities based

Digitized by Google

on direct union between citizens. It *must* abolish all union in the city, abolish the city itself, abolish all direct union between cities. For the federative principle it must substitute the principle of submission and discipline. Submission is its substance. Without this principle it leaves off being the *State;* it becomes a federation.

And the sixteenth century — century of carnage and wars — is entirely summed up in this war waged by the growing States against the cities and the federations. The towns are besieged, taken by assault, pillaged; their inhabitants are decimated or transported. The State is victorious all along the line.

And the consequences are these.

In the fifteenth century Europe was covered by rich cities, whose artisans, masons, weavers, and carvers produced marvels of art, whose universities laid the foundation of science, whose caravans travelled over continents, and whose vessels ploughed rivers and seas.

What was left of them two centuries later? Towns that had numbered fifty or a hundred thousand inhabitants and that had possessed (it was so in Florence) more schools and, in the communal hospitals, more beds per inhabitant than are possessed to-day by the towns best endowed in this respect, had become rotten boroughs. Their inhabitants having been massacred or transported, the State and Church were seizing their riches. Industry was fading under the minute tutelage of State officials. Commerce was dead. The very roads that formerly united the cities had become absolutely impracticable in the seventeenth century.

The State spelt warfare, and wars were devastating Europe and completing the ruin of those towns which the State had not yet ruined direct. But had not the villages, at least, gained by State centralisation? Certainly not! Read what historians tell us about the style of living in the rural districts of Scotland, Tuscany, and Germany in the fourteenth century, and compare their descriptions of that time with the misery of England at the beginning of 1648, in France under the "sun-king" Louis XIV, in Germany, in Italy,

Digitized by Google

everywhere, after a hundred years of State domination.

Misery everywhere! All unanimously recognize it and point it out. Wherever serfdom had been abolished it was reconstituted in a hundred different forms; wherever it had not yet been destroyed it was shaped, under State protection, into a ferocious institution bearing all the characteristics of antique slavery, or even worse.

And could anything else evolve out of this State-produced misery, the State's chief anxiety being to annihilate the village community after the town, to destroy all bonds existing between peasants, to give over their lands to be pillaged by the rich, and to subject them, each individually, to the functionary, the priest and the lord?

VIII

To annihilate the independence of cities; to plunder merchants' and artisans' rich guilds; to centralise the foreign trade of cities into its hands and ruin it; to seize the internal administration of guilds, and subject home trade, as well as all manufactures, even in the slightest detail, to a swarm of functionaries, and by these means kill both industry and arts; to seize upon local militias and all municipal administration; to crush the weak by taxation for the benefit of the strong; and to ruin countries by war,— such was the nascent State's behavior towards urban agglomerations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The same tactics were evidently employed towards villages and peasants. As soon as the State felt itself strong enough, it destroyed the village commune, ruined the peasants committed to its mercy, and plundered the common lands.

Historians and economists paid by the State have taught us that the village commune, having become an obsolete form of land-ownership obstructing agricultural progress, was bound to disappear by the action of natural economic forces. Politicians and bourgeois economists do not tire of repeating this even nowadays, and there are revolutionists and

Digitized by Google

socialists (those who pretend to be scientific) who recite this fable learned in school.

Yet a more odious falsehood has never been affirmed by science. A deliberate falsehood, for history swarms with documents amply proving to those who wish to know (in the case of France it would almost suffice to read Dalloz) that the village commune was first of all deprived by the State of its privileges, of its independence, of its juridical and legislative powers; and that later on its lands were either simply stolen by the rich under State protection, or else confiscated by the State itself.

Plundering began as early as the sixteenth century in France, and grew apace in the following century. As early as 1659 the State took the communes under its superior protection, and we need only read Louis XIV's edict of 1667 to learn what plundering of common lands took place at that period. "Men have taken possession of lands when it suited them. . . . Lands have been divided. . . . In order to plunder the communes fictitious debts have been devised." So said the "Sun-King" in this edict,— and two years later he confiscated for his own benefit all the revenues of the communes. This is what is called in scientific language a "natural death."

In the following century it is estimated that at least half the communal lands were simply appropriated by the aristocracy and the clergy under State patronage. And yet communes continued to exist till 1787. The village council met under the elm, granted lands, and appointed taxes — the documents relating to this are to be found in Babeau (*Le village sous l'ancien régime*). Turgot, in the province of which he was governor, found the village councils "too noisy" and abolished them during his governorship, substituting for them assemblies elected among the well-to-do of the village. In 1787, on the eve of the Revolution, the State made this measure general in its application. The *mir* was abolished, and thus communal affairs fell into the hands of a few syndics, elected by the richest bourgeois and peasants. The "Constituante" sanctioned this law in December, 1789; and

Digitized by Google

the bourgeois, substituting themselves for the nobles, plundered what remained of communal lands. Many a peasant revolt was necessary to force the Convention in 1792 to sanction what the rebellious peasants had accomplished in the eastern part of France That is to say, the Convention ordered the restitution of communal lands to the peasants. This only took place there, when the land had already been retaken by revolutionary means. It is the fate of all revolutionary laws to be put into action when they are already an accomplished fact.

Nevertheless the Convention tainted this law with bourgeois gall. It decreed that lands retaken from nobles should be divided into equal parts among "active citizens" only, — that is to say, among the village bourgeois. By one stroke of the pen it thus dispossessed "passive citizens,"— that is to say, the mass of impoverished peasants, who had most need of these communal lands. Upon which, fortunately, the peasants again revolted, and in 1793 the Convention passed a new law decreeing the division of communal lands among *all* inhabitants. This was never put into practice, and only served as an excuse for new thefts of communal lands.

Would not such measures suffice to bring about what is called the "natural death" of communes? Yet communes still existed. On August 24, 1794, the reaction, being in power, struck the final blow. The State confiscated all communal lands, and made of them a guarantee fund for the public debt, putting them up at auction and selling them to its creatures the "Thermidorians."

This law was happily repealed after being in force three years. But, at the same time, communes were abolished, and replaced by cantonal councils in order that the State might the more easily fill them with its creatures. This lasted till 1801, when village communes were revived. But then the government took it upon itself to appoint mayors and syndics in each of the 36,000 communes! And this absurdity lasted till the revolution of July, 1830, after which the law of 1789 was again put into force. And in the interval communal

Digitized by Google

lands were again wholly confiscated by the State in 1813, and plundered anew during three years. What remained of them was only returned to the communes at the end of that period, in 1816.

This was by no means the end. Every new régime saw in communal lands a source of reward for its supporters. Therefore at three different intervals since 1830, the first time in 1837 and the last under Napoleon III, laws were promulgated to *force* peasants to divide what they possessed of forests and common pasture-lands; and three times the government was compelled to abrogate this law on account of the peasants' resistance. All the same, Napoleon the Third was able to profit by it and bag several large estates for his favorites.

These are facts; and this is what, in scientific language, is called the "natural death" of the communal landed property under the influence of economic laws! As well call the massacre of a hundred thousand soldiers on a battlefield "natural death."

What happened in France happened also in Belgium, England, Germany, Austria,— in fact everywhere in Europe, Slav countries excepted.

Strange that the periods of plundering the communes should correspond in all Western Europe! The methods alone vary. Thus in England those in power did not dare to enact sweeping measures; they preferred passing several thousands of separate "enclosure acts" by which, in each special case, Parliament sanctioned the confiscation of land — it does so still — and gave to the squire the right of keeping common lands he had fenced in. And notwithstanding that Nature has ever since respected the narrow furrows by which communal fields were temporarily divided among families in the villages of England, and that we have clear descriptions of this form of landed property at the beginning of the century in the books of a certain Marshall, scientific men (such as Seebohm, worthy emulator of Fustel de Coulanges) are not wanting to maintain and teach that communes have never existed in England save in the form of serfdom!

Digitized by Google

We find the same thing going on in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain. And in one way or another personal appropriation of lands formerly communal was almost brought to completion towards the middle of this century. Peasants have only kept scraps of their common lands. This is the way in which the mutual assurance of lord, priest, soldier, and judge — the State — has behaved toward peasants in order to despoil them of their last guarantee against misery and economic servitude.

But while organising and sanctioning this plunder, could the State respect the institution of the commune as an organ of local life? Evidently not.

To allow citizens to constitute a federation among themselves in order to appropriate some functions of the State would have been a contradiction of principle. The State demands personal and direct submission of its subjects without intermediate agents; it requires equality in servitude; it cannot allow "the State within the State."

Therefore as soon as the State began to constitute itself in the sixteenth century it set to work to destroy all bonds of union that existed among citizens, both in towns and villages. If under the name of municipal institutions it tolerated any vestiges of autonomy — never of independence — it was only with a fiscal aim to lighten the central budget as far as possible; or else to allow the provincial well-to-do to enrich themselves at the people's expense, as was the case in England, and is so still in institutions and in customs.

This is easily understood. Customary law naturally pertains to local life, and Roman law to centralisation of power. The two cannot live side by side, and the one must kill the other.

That is why under French rule in Algeria, when a Kabyle *djemmah* — a village commune — wants to plead for its lands, every inhabitant of the commune must bring his isolated action before the judge, who will hear fifty or even two hundred isolated actions sooner than hear the collective suit of the *djemmah*. The Jacobin code of the Convention (known under the name of Code Napoleon) does not recognize customary law, it only recognizes Roman or rather Byzantine law.

Digitized by Google

That is why in France when the wind blows down a tree on the national highway, or a peasant gives a stonebreaker two or three francs in preference to the unpleasant task of repairing the communal road himself, it is necessary for twelve or fifteen employees of the Home Office and Treasury to be put in motion, and for more than fifty documents to be exchanged between these austere functionaries, before the tree can be sold or the peasant receives permission to deposit two or three francs into the communal treasury. Should you have any doubts about this, you will find these fifty documents recapitulated and duly numbered by M. Tricoche in the *Journal des Economistes*.

This under the Third Republic, be it understood; for I do not speak of the barbarous methods of the ancient régime, that limited itself to five or six documents. No doubt scientists will tell you that at that barbarous period State control was only fictitious.

And if it were only this! After all, it would be but twenty thousand functionaries too many, and a thousand million francs more added to the budget. A detail for the lovers of "order" and levelling!

But there is worse at the bottom of all this. The *principle* kills everything.

The peasants of a village have a thousand interests in common: interests of economy, neighborhood, and constant intercourse. They are perforce compelled to unite for a thousand divers things. But the State cannot allow them to unite. It gives them school and priest, police and judge; that must suffice them, and should other interests arise they must apply in the regular way to Church and State.

Thus till 1883 it was severely forbidden to the villagers of France to unite, were it only to buy chemical manure or to irrigate their fields. It was only in 1883 that the Republic granted this right to peasants when it voted the law on unions, hampered by many a precaution and obstacle.

And we with our faculties blunted by State education rejoice at the sudden progress accomplished by agricultural syndicates, without blushing at the fact that this right of

Digitized by Google

union of which peasants were deprived for centuries belonged to them without contention in the Middle Ages,—belonged to every man, free or serf. Slaves that we are, we believe it to be a "conquest of democracy"!

IX

"If you have any common interests in the city or the village, ask the Church and the State to look after them. But you are forbidden to combine in a direct way to settle matters for yourself!" Such is the formula reëchoing throughout Europe since the sixteenth century. Already in an edict of Edward III, issued at the end of the fourteenth century, we read that "all unions, combinations, meetings, organised societies, statutes, and oaths already established or to be established by carpenters and masons, will henceforth be null and void." But when the defeat of the towns and of the popular insurrection of which we have spoken was completed, the State boldly laid hands on all the institutions (guilds, fraternities, etc.) which used to bind artisans and peasants together, and annihilated them.

This is plainly seen in England, where a mass of documents exists showing every step of that annihilation. Little by little the State laid hands on all guilds and fraternities. It pressed them closely, abolished their leagues, their festivals, their aldermen, and replaced these by its own functionaries and tribunals; and at the beginning of the fifteenth century, under Henry VIII, the State simply confiscated everything possessed by the guilds without further ado. The heir to the great protestant king finished his father's work.[1]

It was robbery carried on in open daylight, "without excuse" as Thorold Rogers has so well put it. And it is this robbery which the so-called scientific economists represent as the "natural death" of the guilds under the influence of economic laws!

In truth, was it possible for the State to tolerate a guild or corporation of a trade, with its tribunal, its militia, its

[1] See Toulmin Smith's work on Guilds.

Digitized by Google

treasury, its sworn organisation? For the statesmen this was "a State within the State." The State was bound to destroy the guild, and it destroyed it everywhere: in England, in France, in Germany, in Bohemia, preserving only the semblance of the guild as an instrument of the exchequer, as a part of the vast administrative machine.

And should we be astonished that guilds, trade-unions, and wardenships, deprived of everything that was formerly their life and placed under royal functionaries, became in the eighteenth century nought but encumbrances and obstacles to the development of industry, after having been the very life of progress four centuries before? The State had killed them. In fact it did not content itself with destroying the autonomous organisation which was necessary for the very life of the guilds and impeded the encroachments of the State; it did not content itself with confiscating all riches and property of the guilds: it appropriated for itself all their economical functions as well.

In a city of the Middle Ages, when interests conflicted in a trade, or when two guilds disagreed, there was no other appeal than to the city. They were forced to settle matters, to find some compromise, as all guilds were mutually allied in the city. And a compromise was always arrived at,— by calling in another city to arbitrate, if necessary. Henceforth, however, the only arbitrator was the State. All local disputes, sometimes of the most insignificant kind, in the smallest town of a few hundred inhabitants, had to be piled up in the shape of useless documents in the offices of king and parliament. We see the English parliament literally inundated with these thousands of petty local squabbles. It then becomes necessary to have in the capital thousands of functionaries (venal for the greater part) to classify, read, judge all these documents, to pass judgment on every detail: to regulate the way to forge a horseshoe, bleach linen, salt herrings, make a barrel, and so on *ad infinitum*,— and the tide still rose!

But this was not all. Soon the State laid hands on exportation. It saw in this commerce a means of enrichment, and seized upon it. Formerly, when a dispute arose between

Digitized by Google

two towns about the value of exported cloth, the purity of wool, or the capacity of barrels of herrings, the two towns made remonstrances to each other. If the dispute lasted long, they addressed themselves to a third town to step in as arbitrator (this happened constantly); or else a congress of guilds of weavers and coopers was convened to regulate internationally the quality and value of cloth or the capacity of barrels.

Now, however, the State had stepped in and taken upon itself to regulate all these contentions from the centre, in Paris or in London. Through its functionaries it regulated the capacity of barrels, specified the quality of cloth, ordered the number of threads and their thickness in the warp and the woof, and interfered in the smallest details of each industry.

You know the result. Industry under this control was dying out in the eighteenth century.

What had in fact become of Benvenuto Cellini's art under State tutelage? Vanished. And the architecture of those guilds of masons and carpenters whose works of art we still admire? Only look at the hideous monuments of the State period, and at one glance you will know that architecture was dead, so dead that it has never since been able to recover from the blow dealt it by the State.

What became of the fabrics of Bruges, of the cloth from Holland? What became of those blacksmiths, so skilled in manipulating iron, who, in each European borough, knew how to turn that ungrateful metal into the most exquisite decorations? What became of those turners, those clockmakers, those fitters, who had made Nuremberg one of the glories of the Middle Ages by their instruments of precision? Speak of them to James Watt, who for his steam engine looked in vain during thirty years for a man who could make a fairly round cylinder, and whose machine remained thirty years a rough model for want of workmen to construct it!

Such was the result of State interference in the domain of industry. All that the State managed to do was to tighten the screw on the worker, depopulate the land, sow misery

Digitized by Google

in the towns, reduce thousands of beings to the state of starvelings, and impose industrial slavery.

And it is these miserable wrecks of ancient guilds, these organisms mangled and oppressed by the State, that "scientific" economists have the ignorance to confound with the guilds of the Middle Ages! What the great Revolution swept away as harmful to industry was not the guild, or even the trade union; it was a piece of machinery both useless and harmful.

. . . . . .

X

History has not been an uninterrupted evolution. At different intervals evolution has been broken in a certain region, to begin again elsewhere. Egypt, Asia, the banks of the Mediterranean, Central Europe have in turn been the scene of historical developments. But, in every case, the first phase of the evolution has been the primitive tribe, passing on into a village commune, then into the free city, and finally dying out when it reaches the phase of the State.

In Egypt, civilization began by the primitive tribe. It reached the village community phasis, and later on the period of free cities; still later that of the State, which, after a flourishing period, resulted in the death of the country.

The evolution began again in Assyria, in Persia, in Palestine. Again it traversed the same path: the tribe, the village community, the free city, the all-powerful State; and finally the result was — death!

A new civilization then sprang up in Greece. Always beginning by the tribe, it slowly reached the village commune, then the period of republican cities. In these cities, civilization reached its highest summits. But the East brought to them its poisoned breath, its traditions of despotism. Wars and conquests created Alexander's empire of Macedonia. The State enthroned itself, killed all civilization, and then came — death!

Rome in its turn restored civilization. Again we find the primitive tribe at its origin, then the village commune, then

Digitized by Google

the free city. At that stage it reached the apex of its civilization. But then came the State, the Empire, and then — death!

On the ruins of the Roman Empire, Celtic, Germanic, Slavonian, and Scandinavian tribes began civilization anew. Slowly the primitive tribe elaborated its institutions and reached the village commune. It remained at that stage till the twelfth century. Then rose the Republican cities which produced the glorious expansion of the human mind, attested by the monuments of architecture, the grand development of arts, the discoveries that laid the basis of natural sciences. But then came the State.

Will it again produce death? Of course it will, unless we reconstitute Society on a libertarian and anti-State basis. Either the State will be destroyed and a new life will begin in thousands of centres, on the principle of an energetic initiative of the individual, of groups, and of free agreement; or else the State must crush the individual and local life, it must become the master of all the domains of human activity, must bring with it its wars and internal struggles for the possession of power, its surface-revolutions which only change one tyrant for another, and inevitably at the end of this evolution — death!

Choose yourselves which of the two issues you prefer.

Digitized by Google

HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE

(1821–1862)

INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE EXERCISED BY GOVERNMENT[1]

To any one who has studied history in its original sources, the notion that the civilization of Europe is chiefly owing to the ability which has been displayed by the different governments, and to the sagacity with which the evils of society have been palliated by legislative remedies, must appear so extravagant as to make it difficult to refute it with becoming gravity. Indeed, of all the social theories which have ever been broached, there is none so utterly untenable, and so unsound in all its parts, as this. In the first place, we have the obvious consideration that the rulers of a country have, under ordinary circumstances, always been the inhabitants of that country: nurtured by its literature, bred to its traditions, and imbibing its prejudices. Such men are, at best, only the creatures of the age, never its creators. Their measures are the result of social progress, not the cause of it. This may be proved, not only by speculative arguments, but also by a practical consideration, which any reader of history can verify for himself. No great political improvement, no great reform, either legislative or executive, has ever been originated in any country by its rulers. The first suggesters of such steps have invariably been bold and able thinkers, who discern the abuse, denounce it, and point out how it is to be remedied. But long after this is done, even the most enlightened governments continue to uphold the abuse and reject the remedy. At length, if circumstances are favorable, the pressure from without becomes so strong that the gov-

[1] From the first volume, published in 1857, of this author's standard "History of Civilization in England."

Digitized by Google

ernment is obliged to give way; and, the reform being accomplished, the people are expected to admire the wisdom of their rulers, by whom all this has been done. That this is the course of political improvement must be well known to whoever has studied the law-books of different countries in connection with the previous progress of their knowledge. Full and decisive evidence of this will be brought forward in the present work; but, by way of illustration, I may refer to the abolition of the corn-laws, undoubtedly one of the most remarkable facts in the history of England during this century. The propriety and, indeed, the necessity of their abolition is now admitted by every one of tolerable information; and the question arises as to how it was brought about. Those Englishmen who are little versed in the history of their country will say that the real cause was the wisdom of Parliament; while others, attempting to look a little further, will ascribe it to the activity of the Anti-Corn-Law League, and the consequent pressure put upon Government. But whoever will minutely trace the different stages through which this great question successively passed will find that the Government, the Legislature, and the League were the unwitting instruments of a power far greater than all other powers put together. They were simply the exponents of that march of public opinion which on this subject had begun nearly a century before their time. The steps of this vast movement I shall examine on another occasion; at present it is enough to say that soon after the middle of the eighteenth century the absurdity of protective restrictions on trade was so fully demonstrated by the political economists as to be admitted by every man who understood their arguments and had mastered the evidence connected with them. From this moment, the repeal of the corn-laws became a matter, not of party, nor of expediency, but merely of knowledge. Those who knew the facts opposed the laws; those who were ignorant of the facts favored the laws. It was, therefore, clear that whenever the diffusion of knowledge reached a certain point, the laws must fall. The merit of the League was to aid in this diffusion; the merit of the Parliament was to yield to it. It is, however, certain that the members both of League and Legislature could

Digitized by Google

at best only slightly hasten what the progress of knowledge rendered inevitable. If they had lived a century earlier they would have been altogether powerless, because the age would not have been ripe for their labors. They were the creatures of a movement which began long before any of them were born; and the utmost they could do was to put into operation what others had taught, and repeat, in louder tones, the lessons they had learned from their masters. For it was not pretended, they did not even pretend themselves, that there was anything new in the doctrines which they preached from the hustings, and disseminated in every part of the kingdom. The discoveries had long since been made, and were gradually doing their work; encroaching upon old errors, and making proselytes in all directions. The reformers of our time swam with the stream: they aided what it would have been impossible long to resist. Nor is this to be deemed a slight or grudging praise of the services they undoubtedly rendered. The opposition they had to encounter was still immense; and it should always be remembered, as a proof of the backwardness of political knowledge and of the incompetence of political legislators, that although the principles of free trade had been established for nearly a century by a chain of arguments as solid as those on which the truths of mathematics are based, they were to the last moment strenuously resisted; and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Parliament was induced to grant what the people were determined to have, and the necessity of which had been proved by the ablest men during three successive generations.

I have selected this instance as an illustration, because the facts connected with it are undisputed, and, indeed, are fresh in the memory of us all. For it was not concealed at the time, and posterity ought to know, that this great measure, which, with the exception of the Reform Bill, is by far the most important ever passed by a British parliament, was, like the Reform Bill, extorted from the legislature by a pressure from without; that it was conceded, not cheerfully, but with fear; and that it was carried by statesmen who had spent their lives in opposing what they now suddenly advocated. Such was the history of these events; and such likewise has

Digitized by Google

been the history of all those improvements which are important enough to rank as epochs in the history of modern legislation.

Besides this, there is another circumstance worthy the attention of those writers who ascribe a large part of European civilization to measures originated by European governments. This is, that every great reform which has been effected has consisted, not in doing something new, but in undoing something old. The most valuable additions made to legislation have been enactments destructive of preceding legislation; and the best laws which have been passed have been those by which some former laws were repealed. In the case just mentioned, of the corn-laws, all that was done was to repeal the old laws, and leave trade to its natural freedom. When this great reform was accomplished, the only result was to place things on the same footing as if legislators had never interfered at all. Precisely the same remark is applicable to another leading improvement in modern legislation, namely, the decrease of religious persecution. This is unquestionably an immense boon; though, unfortunately, it is still imperfect, even in the most civilized countries. But it is evident that the concession merely consists in this: that legislators have retraced their own steps, and undone their own work. If we examine the policy of the most humane and enlightened governments, we shall find this to be the course they have pursued. The whole scope and tendency of modern legislation is to restore things to that natural channel from which the ignorance of preceding legislation has driven them. This is one of the great works of the present age; and if legislators do it well, they will deserve the gratitude of mankind. But though we may thus be grateful to individual lawgivers, we owe no thanks to lawgivers considered as a class. For since the most valuable improvements in legislation are those which subvert preceding legislation, it is clear that the balance of good cannot be on their side. It is clear that the progress of civilization cannot be due to those who, on the most important subjects, have done so much harm that their successors are considered benefactors simply because they reverse their policy, and thus restore affairs to the state in which they would have remained if

Digitized by Google

politicians had allowed them to run on in the course which the wants of society required.

Indeed, the extent to which the governing classes have interfered, and the mischiefs which that interference has produced, are so remarkable as to make thoughtful men wonder how civilization could advance in the face of such repeated obstacles. In some of the European countries the obstacles have, in fact, proved insuperable, and the national progress is thereby stopped. Even in England, where, from causes which I shall presently relate, the higher ranks have for some centuries been less powerful than elsewhere, there has been inflicted an amount of evil which, though much smaller than that incurred in other countries, is sufficiently serious to form a melancholy chapter in the history of the human mind. To sum up these evils would be to write a history of English legislation; for it may be broadly stated that, with the exception of certain necessary enactments respecting the preservation of order and the punishment of crime, nearly every thing which has been done has been done amiss. Thus, to take only such conspicuous facts as do not admit of controversy, it is certain that all the most important interests have been grievously damaged by the attempts of legislators to aid them. Among the accessories of modern civilization there is none of greater moment than trade, the spread of which has probably done more than any other single agent to increase the comfort and happiness of man. But every European government which has legislated much respecting trade has acted as if its main object were to suppress the trade and ruin the traders. Instead of leaving the national industry to take its own course, it has been troubled by an interminable series of regulations, all intended for its good, and all inflicting serious harm. To such a height has this been carried that the commercial reforms which have distinguished England during the last twenty years have solely consisted in undoing this mischievous and intrusive legislation. The laws formerly enacted on this subject, and too many of which are still in force, are marvellous to contemplate. It is no exaggeration to say that the history of the

Digitized by Google

commercial legislation of Europe presents every possible contrivance for hampering the energies of commerce. Indeed, a very high authority, who has maturely studied this subject, has recently declared that if it had not been for smuggling trade could not have been conducted, but must have perished in consequence of this incessant interference. However paradoxical this assertion may appear, it will be denied by no one who knows how feeble trade once was, and how strong the obstacles were which opposed it. In every quarter, and at every moment, the hand of government was felt. Duties on importation, and duties on exportation; bounties to raise up a losing trade, and taxes to pull down a remunerative one; this branch of industry forbidden, and that branch of industry encouraged; one article of commerce must not be grown, because it was grown in the colonies, another article might be grown and bought, but not sold again, while a third article might be bought and sold, but not leave the country. Then, too, we find laws to regulate wages; laws to regulate prices; laws to regulate profits; laws to regulate the interest on money; custom-house arrangements of the most vexatious kind, aided by a complicated scheme which was well called the sliding scale,— a scheme of such perverse ingenuity that all duties constantly varied on the same article, and no man could calculate beforehand what he would have to pay. To this uncertainty, itself the bane of all commerce, there was added a severity of exaction, felt by every class of consumers and producers. The tolls were so onerous as to double and often quadruple the cost of production. A system was organized, and strictly enforced, of interference with markets, interference with manufactories, interference with machinery, interference even with shops. The towns were guarded by excisemen, and the ports swarmed with tide-waiters, whose sole business was to inspect nearly every process of domestic industry, peer into every package, and tax every article; while, that absurdity might be carried to its extreme height, a large part of all this was by way of protection: that is to say, the money was avowedly raised, and the inconvenience suffered, not for the use of the gov-

Digitized by Google

ernment, but for the benefit of the people; in other words, the industrious classes were robbed in order that industry might thrive.

Such are some of the benefits which European trade owes to the paternal care of European legislators. But worse still remains behind. For the economical evils, great as they were, have been far surpassed by the moral evils which this system produced. The first inevitable consequence was that, in every part of Europe, there arose numerous and powerful gangs of armed smugglers, who lived by disobeying the laws which their ignorant rulers had imposed. These men, desperate from the fear of punishment, and accustomed to the commission of every crime, contaminated the surrounding population; introduced into peaceful villages vices formerly unknown; caused the ruin of entire families; spread, wherever they came, drunkenness, theft, and dissoluteness; and familiarized their associates with those coarse and swinish debaucheries which were the natural habits of so vagrant and lawless a life. The innumerable crimes arising from this are directly chargeable upon the European governments by whom they were provoked. The offences were caused by the laws; and now that the laws are repealed, the offences have disappeared. But it will hardly be pretended that the interests of civilization have been advanced by such a policy as this. It will hardly be pretended that we owe much to a system which, having called into existence a new class of criminals, at length retraces its steps; and, though it thus puts an end to the crime, only destroys what its own act had created.

It is unnecessary to say that these remarks do not affect the real services rendered to society by every tolerably organized government. In all countries, a power of punishing crime and of framing laws must reside somewhere; otherwise the nation is in a state of anarchy. But the accusation which the historian is bound to bring against every government which has hitherto existed is that it has overstepped its proper functions, and at each step has done incalculable harm. The love of exercising power has been found to be so universal that no class of men who have possessed author-

Digitized by Google

ity have been able to avoid abusing it. To maintain order, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, and to adopt certain precautions respecting the public health, are the only services which any government can render to the interests of civilization. That these are services of immense value, no one will deny; but it cannot be said that by them civilization is advanced, or the progress of Man accelerated. All that is done is to afford the opportunity of progress; the progress itself must depend upon other matters. And that this is the sound view of legislation is, moreover, evident from the fact that as knowledge is becoming more diffused, and as an increasing experience is enabling each successive generation better to understand the complicated relations of life, just in the same proportion are men insisting upon the repeal of those protective laws the enactment of which was deemed by politicians to be the greatest triumph of political foresight.

Seeing, therefore, that the efforts of government in favor of civilization are, when most successful, altogether negative; and seeing, too, that when those efforts are more than negative they become injurious,— it clearly follows that all speculations must be erroneous which ascribe the progress of Europe to the wisdom of its rulers. This is an inference which rests not only on the arguments already adduced, but on facts which might be multiplied from every page of history. For no government having recognized its proper limits, the result is that every government has inflicted on its subjects great injuries; and has done this nearly always with the best intentions. The effects of its protective policy in injuring trade, and, what is far worse, in increasing crime, have just been noticed; and to these instances innumerable others might be added. Thus, during many centuries, every government thought it was its bounden duty to encourage religious truth and discourage religious error. The mischief this has produced is incalculable. Putting aside all other considerations, it is enough to mention its two leading consequences; which are, the increase of hypocrisy, and the increase of perjury. The increase of hypocrisy is the inevitable result of connecting any description of penalty with the profession of par-

Digitized by Google

ticular opinions. Whatever may be the case with individuals, it is certain that the majority of men find an extreme difficulty in long resisting constant temptation. And when the temptation comes to them in the shape of honor and emolument, they are too often ready to profess the dominant opinions, and abandon, not indeed their belief, but the external marks by which that belief is made public. Every man who takes this step is a hypocrite; and every government which encourages this step to be taken is an abettor of hypocrisy and a creator of hypocrites. Well, therefore, may we say that when a government holds out as a bait that those who profess certain opinions shall enjoy certain privileges, it plays the part of the tempter of old, and, like the Evil One, basely offers the good things of this world to him who will change his worship and deny his faith. At the same time, and as a part of this system, the increase of perjury has accompanied the increase of hypocrisy. For legislators, plainly seeing that proselytes thus obtained could not be relied upon, have met the danger by the most extraordinary precautions; and compelling men to confirm their belief by repeated oaths, have thus sought to protect the old creed against the new converts. It is this suspicion as to the motives of others which has given rise to oaths of every kind and in every direction. In England, even the boy at college is forced to swear about matters which he cannot understand, and which far riper minds are unable to master. If he afterwards goes into Parliament, he must again swear about his religion; and at nearly every stage of political life he must take fresh oaths, the solemnity of which is often strangely contrasted with the trivial functions to which they are the prelude. A solemn adjuration of the Deity being thus made at every turn, it has happened, as might have been expected, that oaths, enjoined as a matter of course, have at length degenerated into a matter of form. What is lightly taken is easily broken. And the best observers of English society — observers, too, whose characters are very different, and who hold the most opposite opinions — are all agreed on this, that the perjury habitually practiced in England, and of which government is the immediate creator, is so general

Digitized by Google

that it has become a source of national corruption, has diminished the value of human testimony, and shaken the confidence which men naturally place in the word of their fellow-creatures.

The open vices and, what is much more dangerous, the hidden corruption thus generated in the midst of society by the ignorant interference of Christian rulers is indeed a painful subject; but it is one which I could not omit in an analysis of the causes of civilization. It would be easy to push the inquiry still further, and to show how legislators, in every attempt they have made to protect some particular interests and uphold some particular principles, have not only failed, but have brought about results diametrically opposite to those which they proposed. We have seen that their laws in favor of industry have injured industry; that their laws in favor of religion have increased hypocrisy; and that their laws to secure truth have encouraged perjury. Exactly in the same way, nearly every country has taken steps to prevent usury and keep down the interest of money; and the invariable effect has been to increase usury and raise the interest of money. For since no prohibition, however stringent, can destroy the natural relation between demand and supply, it has followed that when some men want to borrow, and other men want to lend, both parties are sure to find means of evading a law which interferes with their mutual rights. If the two parties were left to adjust their own bargain undisturbed the usury would depend on the circumstances of the loan, such as the amount of security and the chance of repayment. But this natural arrangement has been complicated by the interference of government. A certain risk being always incurred by those who disobey the law, the usurer very properly refuses to lend his money unless he is also compensated for the danger he is in from the penalty hanging over him. This compensation can only be made by the borrower, who is thus obliged to pay what in reality is a double interest: one interest for the natural risk on the loan, and another interest for the extra risk from the law. Such, then, is the position in which every European legislature has placed itself. By enactments against usury it has

Digitized by Google

increased what it wished to destroy: it has passed laws which the imperative necessities of men compel them to violate: while, to wind up the whole, the penalty for such violation falls on the borrowers,— that is, on the very class in whose favor the legislators interfered.

In the same meddling spirit, and with the same mistaken notions of protection, the great Christian governments have done other things still more injurious. They have made strenuous and repeated efforts to destroy the liberty of the press, and prevent men from expressing their sentiments on the most important questions in politics and religion. In nearly every country, they, with the aid of the church, have organized a vast system of literary police, the sole object of which is to abrogate the undoubted right of every citizen to lay his opinions before his fellow-citizens. In the very few countries where they have stopped short of these extreme steps, they have had recourse to others less violent but equally unwarrantable. For even where they have not openly forbidden the free dissemination of knowledge, they have done all that they could to check it. On all the implements of knowledge, and on all the means by which it is diffused, such as paper, books, political journals, and the like, they have imposed duties so heavy that they could hardly have done worse if they had been the sworn advocates of popular ignorance. Indeed, looking at what they have actually accomplished, it may be emphatically said that they have taxed the human mind. They have made the very thoughts of men pay toll. Whoever wishes to communicate his ideas to others, and thus do what he can to increase the stock of our acquirements, must first pour his contributions into the imperial exchequer. That is the penalty inflicted on him for instructing his fellow-creatures. That is the blackmail which government extorts from literature and on receipt of which it accords its favor and agrees to abstain from further demands. And what causes all this to be the more insufferable is the use which is made of these and similar exactions, wrung from every kind of industry, both bodily and mental. It is truly a frightful consideration that knowledge is to be hindered, and that the proceeds of honest labor, of patient thought,

Digitized by Google

and sometimes of profound genius are to be diminished, in order that a large part of their scanty earnings may go to swell the pomp of an idle and ignorant court, minister to the caprice of a few powerful individuals, and too often supply them with the means of turning against the people resources which the people called into existence.

These, and the foregoing statements respecting the effects produced on European society by political legislation, are not doubtful or hypothetical inferences, but are such as every reader of history may verify for himself. Indeed, some of them are still acting in England; and, in one country or another, the whole of them may be seen in full force. When put together they compose an aggregate so formidable that we may well wonder how, in the face of them, civilization has been able to advance. That, under such circumstances, it has advanced is a decisive proof of the extraordinary energy of Man; and justifies a confident belief that as the pressure of legislation is diminished, and the human mind less hampered, the progress will contine with accelerated speed. But it is absurd, it would be a mockery of all sound reasoning, to ascribe to legislation any share in the progress, or to expect any benefit from future legislators except that sort of benefit which consists in undoing the work of their predecessors. This is what the present generation claims at their hands; and it should be remembered that what one generation solicits as a boon the next generation demands as a right. And, when the right is pertinaciously refused, one of two things has always happened: either the nation has retrograded or else the people have risen. Should the government remain firm, this is the cruel dilemma in which men are placed: if they submit, they injure their country; if they rebel, they may injure it still more. In the ancient monarchies of the East, their usual plan was to yield; in the monarchies of Europe, it has been to resist. Hence those insurrections and rebellions which occupy so large a space in modern history, and which are but repetitions of the old story, the undying struggle between oppressors and oppressed. It would, however, be unjust to deny that in one country the fatal crisis has now for several generations been successfully averted.

Digitized by Google

In one European country, and in one alone, the people have been so strong, and the government so weak, that the history of legislation, taken as a whole, is, notwithstanding a few aberrations, the history of slow but constant concession: reforms which would have been refused to argument have been yielded from fear; while, from the steady increase of democratic opinions, protection after protection and privilege after privilege have, even in our own time, been torn away; until the old institutions, though they retain their former name, have lost their former vigor, and there no longer remains a doubt as to what their fate must ultimately be. Nor need we add that in this same country where, more than in any other of Europe, legislators are the exponents and the servants of the popular will, the progress has, on this account, been more undeviating than elsewhere; there has been neither anarchy nor revolution; and the world has been made familiar with the great truth that one main condition of the prosperity of a people is that its rulers shall have very little power, that they shall exercise that power very sparingly, and that they shall by no means presume to raise themselves into supreme judges of the national interests, or deem themselves authorized to defeat the wishes of those for whose benefit alone they occupy the post intrusted to them.

Digitized by Google

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

(1803–1882)

POLITICS [1]

In dealing with the State we ought to remember that its institutions are not aboriginal, though they existed before we were born; that they are not superior to the citizen; that every one of them was once the act of a single man; every law and usage was a man's expedient to meet a particular case; that they all are imitable, all alterable; we may make as good, we may make better. Society is an illusion to the young citizen. It lies before him in rigid repose, with certain names, men and institutions rooted like oak-trees to the centre, round which all arrange themselves the best they can. But the old statesman knows that society is fluid: there are no such roots and centres, but any particle may suddenly become the centre of the movement and compel the system to gyrate round it; as every man of strong will, like Pisistratus or Cromwell, does for a time, and every man of truth, like Plato or Paul, does forever. But politics rest on necessary foundations, and cannot be treated with levity. Republics abound in young civilians who believe that the laws make the city, that grave modifications of the policy and modes of living and employments of the population, that commerce, education, and religion, may be voted in or out; and that any measure, though it were absurd, may be imposed on a people if only you can get sufficient voices to make it a law. But the wise know that foolish legislation is a rope of sand which perishes in the twisting; that the State must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen; the strongest usurper is quickly got rid of; and they only who build on Ideas, build for eternity; and that the form of

[1] First published in 1844 in the volume of "Essays: Second Series."

Digitized by Google

government which prevails is the expression of what cultivation exists in the population which permits it. The law is only a memorandum. We are superstitious, and esteem the statute somewhat: so much life as it has in the character of living men is its force. The statute stands there to say, Yesterday we agreed so and so, but how feel ye this article to-day? Our statute is a currency which we stamp with our own portrait: it soon becomes unrecognizable, and in process of time will return to the mint. Nature is not democratic nor limited-monarchical, but despotic, and will not be fooled or abated of any jot of her authority by the pertest of her sons; and as fast as the public mind is opened to more intelligence, the code is seen to be brute and stammering. It speaks not articulately, and must be made to. Meantime the education of the general mind never stops. The reveries of the true and simple are prophetic. What the tender poetic youth dreams, and prays, and paints to-day, but shuns the ridicule of saying aloud, shall presently be the resolutions of public bodies; then shall be carried as grievance and bill of rights through conflict and war, and then shall be triumphant law and establishment for a hundred years, until it gives place in turn to new prayers and pictures. The history of the State sketches in coarse outline the progress of thought, and follows at a distance the delicacy of culture and of aspiration.

The theory of politics which has possessed the mind of men, and which they have expressed the best they could in their laws and in their revolutions, considers persons and property as the two objects for whose protection government exists. Of persons, all have equal rights, in virtue of being identical in nature. This interest of course with its whole power demands a democracy. Whilst the rights of all as persons are equal, in virtue of their access to reason, their rights in property are very unequal. One man owns his clothes, and another owns a county. This accident, depending primarily on the skill and virtue of the parties, of which there is every degree, and secondarily on patrimony, falls unequally, and its rights of course are unequal. Personal rights, universally the same, demand a government framed on the ratio

Digitized by Google

of the census; property demands a government framed on the ratio of owners and of owning. Laban, who has flocks and herds, wishes them looked after by an officer on the frontiers, lest the Midianites shall drive them off; and pays a tax to that end. Jacob has no flocks or herds and no fear of the Midianites, and pays no tax to the officer. It seemed fit that Laban and Jacob should have equal rights to elect the officer who is to defend their persons, but that Laban and not Jacob should elect the officer who is to guard the sheep and cattle. And if question arise whether additional officers or watch-towers should be provided, must not Laban and Isaac, and those who must sell part of their herds to buy protection for the rest, judge better of this, and with more right, than Jacob, who, because he is a youth and a traveller, eats their bread and not his own?

In the earliest society the proprietors made their own wealth, and so long as it comes to the owners in the direct way, no other opinion would arise in any equitable community than that property should make the law for property, and persons the law for persons.

But property passes through donation or inheritance to those who do not create it. Gift, in one case, makes it as really the new owner's, as labor made it the first owner's: in the other case, of patrimony, the law makes an ownership which will be valid in each man's view according to the estimate which he sets on public tranquillity

It was not however found easy to embody the readily admitted principle that property should make law for property, and persons for persons; since persons and property mixed themselves in every transaction. At last it seemed settled that the rightful distinction was that the proprietors should have more elective franchise than non-proprietors, on the Spartan principle of "calling that which is just, equal; not that which is equal, just."

That principle no longer looks so self-evident as it appeared in former times, partly because doubts have arisen whether too much weight had not been allowed in the laws to property, and such a structure given to our usages as allowed the rich to encroach on the poor, and to keep them poor;

Digitized by Google

but mainly because there is an instinctive sense, however obscure and yet inarticulate, that the whole constitution of property, on its present tenures, is injurious, and its influence on persons deteriorating and degrading; that truly the only interest for the consideration of the State is persons; that property will always follow persons; that the highest end of government is the culture of men; and that if men can be educated, the institutions will share their improvement and the moral sentiment will write the law of the land.

If it be not easy to settle the equity of this question, the peril is less when we take note of our natural defences. We are kept by better guards than the vigilance of such magistrates as we commonly elect. Society always consists in greatest part of young and foolish persons. The old, who have seen through the hypocrisy of courts and statesmen, die and leave no wisdom to their sons. They believe their own newspaper, as their fathers did at their age. With such an ignorant and deceivable majority, States would soon run to ruin, but that there are limitations beyond which the folly and ambition of governors cannot go. Things have their laws, as well as men; and things refuse to be trifled with. Property will be protected. Corn will not grow unless it is planted and manured; but the farmer will not plant or hoe it unless the chances are a hundred to one that he will cut and harvest it. Under any forms, persons and property must and will have their just sway. They exert their power, as steadily as matter its attraction. Cover up a pound of earth never so cunningly; divide and subdivide it; melt it to liquid, convert it to gas; it will always weigh a pound; it will always attract and resist other matter by the full virtue of one pound weight: — and the attributes of a person, his wit and his moral energy, will exercise, under any law or extinguishing tyranny, their proper force,— if not overtly, then covertly; if not for the law, then against it; if not wholesomely, then poisonously; with right, or by might.

The boundaries of personal influence it is impossible to fix, as persons are organs of moral or supernatural force. Under the dominion of an idea which possesses the minds of multitudes, as civil freedom, or the religious sentiment, the

Digitized by Google

powers of persons are no longer subjects of calculation. A nation of men unanimously bent on freedom or conquest can easily confound the arithmetic of statists, and achieve extravagant actions, out of all proportion to their means; as the Greeks, the Saracens, the Swiss, the Americans, and the French have done.

In like manner to every particle of property belongs its own attraction. A cent is the representative of a certain quantity of corn or other commodity. Its value is in the necessities of the animal man. It is so much warmth, so much bread, so much water, so much land. The law may do what it will with the owner of property; its just power will still attach to the cent. The law may in a mad freak say that all shall have power except the owners of property; they shall have no vote. Nevertheless, by a higher law, the property will, year after year, write every statute that respects property. The non-proprietor will be the scribe of the proprietor. What the owners wish to do, the whole power of property will do, either through the law or else in defiance of it. Of course I speak of all the property, not merely of the great estates. When the rich are outvoted, as frequently happens, it is the joint treasury of the poor which exceeds their accumulations. Every man owns something, if it is only a cow, or a wheelbarrow, or his arms, and so has that property to dispose of.

The same necessity which secures the rights of person and property against the malignity or folly of the magistrate, determines the form and methods of governing, which are proper to each nation and to its habit of thought, and nowise transferable to other states of society. In this country we are very vain of our political institutions, which are singular in this, that they sprung, within the memory of living men, from the character and condition of the people, which they still express with sufficient fidelity,— and we ostentatiously prefer them to any other in history. They are not better, but only fitter for us. We may be wise in asserting the advantage in modern times of the democratic form, but to other states of society, in which religion consecrated the monarchical, that and not this was expedient. Democracy is better for us, because the religious sentiment of the present

Digitized by Google

time accords better with it. Born democrats, we are nowise qualified to judge of monarchy, which, to our fathers living in the monarchical idea, was also relatively right. But our institutions, though in coincidence with the spirit of the age, have not any exemption from the practical defects which have discredited other forms. Every actual State is corrupt. Good men must not obey the laws too well. What satire on government can equal the severity of censure conveyed in the word *politic,* which now for ages has signified *cunning,* intimating that the State is a trick?

The same benign necessity and the same practical abuse appear in the parties, into which each State divides itself, of opponents and defenders of the administration of the government. Parties are also founded on instincts, and have better guides to their own humble aims than the sagacity of their leaders. They have nothing perverse in their origin, but rudely mark some real and lasting relation. We might as wisely reprove the east wind or the frost, as a political party, whose members, for the most part, could give no account of their position, but stand for the defence of those interests in which they find themselves. Our quarrel with them begins when they quit this deep natural ground at the bidding of some leader, and obeying personal considerations, throw themselves into the maintenance and defence of points nowise belonging to their system. A party is perpetually corrupted by personality. Whilst we absolve the association from dishonesty, we cannot extend the same charity to their leaders. They reap the rewards of the docility and zeal of the masses which they direct. Ordinarily our parties are parties of circumstance, and not of principle; as the planting interest in conflict with the commercial; the party of capitalists and that of operatives: parties which are identical in their moral character, and which can easily change ground with each other in the support of many of their measures. Parties of principle, as, religious sects, or the party of free-trade, of universal suffrage, of abolition of slavery, of abolition of capital punishment,— degenerate into personalities, or would inspire enthusiasm. The vice of our leading parties in this country (which may be cited as a fair specimen of these

Digitized by Google

societies of opinion) is that they do not plant themselves on the deep and necessary grounds to which they are respectively entitled, but lash themselves to fury in the carrying of some local and momentary measure, nowise useful to the commonwealth. Of the two great parties which at this hour almost share the nation between them, I should say that one has the best cause, and the other contains the best men. The philosopher, the poet, or the religious man, will of course wish to cast his vote with the democrat, for free-trade, for wide suffrage, for the abolition of legal cruelties in the penal code, and for facilitating in every manner the access of the young and the poor to the sources of wealth and power. But he can rarely accept the persons whom the so-called popular party propose to him as representatives of these liberalities. They have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtue are in it. The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless: it is not loving; it has no ulterior and divine ends, but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population, is timid, and merely defensive of property. It vindicates no right, it aspires to no real good, it brands no crime, it proposes no generous policy; it does not build, nor write, nor cherish the arts, nor foster religion, nor establish schools, nor encourage science, nor emancipate the slave, nor befriend the poor, or the Indian, or the immigrant. From neither party, when in power, has the world any benefit to expect in science, art, or humanity, at all commensurate with the resources of the nation.

I do not for these defects despair of our republic. We are not at the mercy of any waves of chance. In the strife of ferocious parties, human nature always finds itself cherished; as the children of the convicts at Botany Bay are found to have as healthy a moral sentiment as other children. Citizens of feudal states are alarmed at our democratic institutions lapsing into anarchy, and the older and more cautious among ourselves are learning from Europeans to look with some terror at our turbulent freedom. It is said that

Digitized by Google

in our license of construing the Constitution, and in the despotism of public opinion, we have no anchor; and one foreign observer thinks he has found the safeguard in the sanctity of Marriage among us; and another thinks he has found it in our Calvinism. Fisher Ames expressed the popular security more wisely, when he compared a monarchy and a republic, saying that a monarchy is a merchantman, which sails well, but will sometimes strike on a rock and go to the bottom; whilst a republic is a raft, which would never sink, but then your feet are always in water. No forms can have any dangerous importance whilst we are befriended by the laws of things. It makes no difference how many tons weight of atmosphere presses on our heads, so long as the same pressure resists it within the lungs. Augment the mass a thousand fold, it cannot begin to crush us, as long as reaction is equal to action. The fact of two poles, of two forces, centripetal and centrifugal, is universal, and each force by its own activity develops the other. Wild liberty develops iron conscience. Want of liberty, by strengthening law and decorum, stupefies conscience. "Lynch-law" prevails only where there is greater hardihood and self-subsistency in the leaders. A mob cannot be a permanency; everybody's interest requires that it should not exist, and only justice satisfies all.

We must trust infinitely to the beneficent necessity which shines through all laws. Human nature expresses itself in them as characteristically as in statues, or songs, or railroads; and an abstract of the codes of nations would be a transcript of the common conscience. Governments have their origin in the moral identity of men. Reason for one is seen to be reason for another, and for every other. There is a middle measure which satisfies all parties, be they never so many or so resolute for their own. Every man finds a sanction for his simplest claims and deeds, in decisions of his own mind, which he calls Truth and Holiness. In these decisions all the citizens find a perfect agreement, and only in these; not in what is good to eat, good to wear, good use of time, or what amount of land or of public aid each is entitled to claim. This truth and justice men presently

Digitized by Google

endeavor to make application of to the measuring of land, the apportionment of service, the protection of life and property. Their first endeavors, no doubt, are very awkward. Yet absolute right is the first governor; or, every government is an impure theocracy. The idea after which each community is aiming to make and mend its law, is the will of the wise man. The wise man it cannot find in nature, and it makes awkward but earnest efforts to secure his government by contrivance; as by causing the entire people to give their voices on every measure; or by a double choice to get the representation of the whole; or by a selection of the best citizens; or to secure the advantages of efficiency and internal peace by confiding the government to one, who may himself select his agents. All forms of government symbolize an immortal government, common to all dynasties and independent of numbers, perfect where two men exist, perfect where there is only one man.

Every man's nature is a sufficient advertisement to him of the character of his fellows. My right and my wrong is their right and their wrong. Whilst I do what is fit for me, and abstain from what is unfit, my neighbor and I shall often agree in our means, and work together for a time to one end. But whenever I find my dominion over myself not sufficient for me, and undertake the direction of him also, I overstep the truth, and come into false relations to him. I may have so much more skill or strength than he that he cannot express adequately his sense of wrong, but it is a lie, and hurts like a lie both him and me. Love and nature cannot maintain the assumption; it must be executed by a practical lie, namely by force. This undertaking for another is the blunder which stands in colossal ugliness in the governments of the world. It is the same thing in numbers, as in a pair, only not quite so intelligible. I can see well enough a great difference between my setting myself down to a self-control, and my going to make somebody else act after my views; but when a quarter of the human race assume to tell me what I must do, I may be too much disturbed by the circumstances to see so clearly the absurdity of their command. Therefore all public ends look vague and quixotic

Digitized by Google

beside private ones. For any laws but those which men make for themselves, are laughable. If I put myself in the place of my child, and we stand in one thought and see that things are thus or thus, that perception is law for him and me. We are both there, both act. But if, without carrying him into the thought, I look over into his plot, and, guessing how it is with him, ordain this or that, he will never obey me. This is the history of governments,— one man does something which is to bind another. A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me; looking from afar at me ordains that a part of my labor shall go to this or that whimsical end,— not as I, but as he happens to fancy. Behold the consequence. Of all debts men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire is this on government! Everywhere they think they get their money's worth, except for these.

Hence the less government we have the better,— the fewer laws, and the less confided power. The antidote to this abuse of formal Government is the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual; the appearance of the principal to supersede the proxy; the appearance of the wise man; of whom the existing government is, it must be owned, but a shabby imitation. That which all things tend to educe; which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, revolutions, go to form and deliver, is character; that is the end of Nature, to reach unto this coronation of her king. To educate the wise man the State exists, and with the appearance of the wise man the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy,— he loves men too well; no bribe, or feast, or palace, to draw friends to him; no vantage ground, no favorable circumstance. He needs no library, for he has not done thinking; no church, for he is a prophet; no statute book, for he has the lawgiver; no money, for he is value; no road, for he is at home where he is; no experience, for the life of the creator shoots through him, and looks from his eyes. He has no personal friends, for he who has the spell to draw the prayer and piety of all men unto him needs not husband and educate a few to

Digitized by Google

share with him a select and poetic life. His relation to men is angelic; his memory is myrrh to them; his presence, frankincense and flowers.

We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star. In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy. As a political power, as the rightful lord who is to tumble all rulers from their chairs, its presence is hardly yet suspected. Malthus and Ricardo quite omit it; the Annual Register is silent; in the Conversations' Lexicon it is not set down; the President's Message, the Queen's Speech, have not mentioned it; and yet it is never nothing. Every thought which genius and piety throw into the world, alters the world. The gladiators in the lists of power feel, through all their frocks of force and simulation, the presence of worth. I think the very strife of trade and ambition is confession of this divinity; and successes in those fields are the poor amends, the figleaf with which the shamed soul attempts to hide its nakedness. I find the like unwilling homage in all quarters. It is because we know how much is due from us that we are impatient to show some petty talent as a substitute for worth. We are haunted by a conscience of this right to grandeur of character, and are false to it. But each of us has some talent, can do somewhat useful, or graceful, or formidable, or amusing, or lucrative. That we do, as an apology to others and to ourselves for not reaching the mark of a good and equal life. But it does not satisfy *us*, whilst we thrust it on the notice of our companions. It may throw dust in their eyes, but does not smooth our own brow, or give us the tranquillity of the strong when we walk abroad. We do penance as we go. Our talent is a sort of expiation, and we are constrained to reflect on our splendid moment with a certain humiliation, as somewhat too fine, and not as one act of many acts, a fair expression of our permanent energy. Most persons of ability meet in society with a kind of tacit appeal. Each seems to say, "I am not all here." Senators and presidents have climbed so high with pain enough, not because they think the place specially agreeable, but as an apology for real worth, and to vindicate their manhood in our

Digitized by Google

eyes. This conspicuous chair is their compensation to themselves for being of a poor, cold, hard nature. They must do what they can. Like one class of forest animals, they have nothing but a prehensile tail; climb they must, or crawl. If a man found himself so rich-natured that he could enter into strict relations with the best persons and make life serene around him by the dignity and sweetness of his behavior, could he afford to circumvent the favor of the caucus and the press, and covet relations so hollow and pompous as those of a politician? Surely nobody would be a charlatan who could afford to be sincere.

The tendencies of the times favor the idea of self-government, and leave the individual, for all code, to the rewards and penalties of his own constitution; which work with more energy than we believe whilst we depend on artificial restraints. The movement in this direction has been very marked in modern history. Much has been blind and discreditable, but the nature of the revolution is not affected by the vices of the revolters; for this is a purely moral force. It was never adopted by any party in history, neither can be. It separates the individual from all party, and unites him at the same time to the race. It promises a recognition of higher rights than those of personal freedom, or the security of property. A man has a right to be employed, to be trusted, to be loved, to be revered. The power of love, as the basis of a State, has never been tried. We must not imagine that all things are lapsing into confusion if every tender protestant be not compelled to bear his part in certain social conventions; nor doubt that roads can be built, letters carried, and the fruit of labor secured, when the government of force is at an end. Are our methods now so excellent that all competition is hopeless? could not a nation of friends even devise better ways? On the other hand, let not the most conservative and timid fear anything from a premature surrender of the bayonet and the system of force. For, according to the order of nature, which is quite superior to our will, it stands thus; there will always be a government of force where men are selfish; and when they are pure enough to abjure the code of force they will be wise enough to see

Digitized by Google

how these public ends of the post-office, of the highway, of commerce and the exchange of property, of museums and libraries, of institutions of art and science can be answered.

We live in a very low state of the world, and pay unwilling tribute to governments founded on force. There is not, among the most religious and instructed men of the most religious and civil nations, a reliance on the moral sentiment and a sufficient belief in the unity of things, to persuade them that society can be maintained without artificial restraints, as well as the solar system; or that the private citizen might be reasonable and a good neighbor, without the hint of a jail or a confiscation. What is strange too, there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire him with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right and love. All those who have pretended this design have been partial reformers, and have admitted in some manner the supremacy of the bad State. I do not call to mind a single human being who has steadily denied the authority of the laws, on the simple ground of his own moral nature. Such designs, full of genius and full of faith as they are, are not entertained except avowedly as air-pictures. If the individual who exhibits them dare to think them practicable, he disgusts scholars and churchmen; and men of talent and women of superior sentiments cannot hide their contempt. Not the less does nature continue to fill the heart of youth with suggestions of this enthusiasm, and there are now men,— if indeed I can speak in the plural number, — more exactly, I will say, I have just been conversing with one man, to whom no weight of adverse experience will make it for a moment appear impossible that thousands of human beings might exercise towards each other the grandest and simplest sentiments, as well as a knot of friends, or a pair of lovers.

Digitized by Google

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

(1817–1862)

ON THE DUTY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE [1]

I heartily accept the motto,—"That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

This American government,—what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this; for the people must have some complicated

[1] First published in 1849, under the title "Resistance to Civil Government." A few pages devoted to Thoreau's prison experiences, and to comments on and quotations from Daniel Webster, are omitted from the present reprint.

Digitized by Google

machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have. Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even impose on themselves, for their own advantage. It is excellent, we must all allow. Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. *It* does not keep the country free. *It* does not settle the West. *It* does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. For government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most expedient, the governed are most let alone by it. Trade and commerce, if they were not made of india-rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way; and, if one were to judge these men wholly by the effects of their actions and not partly by their intentions, they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous persons who put obstructions on the railroads.

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.

After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? — in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his

Digitized by Google

conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly enough said, that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power? Visit the Navy-yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make, or such as it can make a man with its black arts,— a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral accompaniments, though it may be,—

> Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
> As his corse to the rampart we hurried;
> Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
> O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

The mass of men serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or

Digitized by Google

a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others — as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders — serve the State chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without *intending* it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and *men*, serve the State with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. A wise man will only be useful as a man, and will not submit to be "clay," and "stop a hole to keep the wind away," but leave that office to his dust at least: —

> I am too high-born to be propertied,
> To be a secondary at control,
> Or useful serving-man and instrument
> To any sovereign state throughout the world.

He who gives himself entirely to his fellow-men appears to them useless and selfish; but he who gives himself partially to them is pronounced a benefactor and philanthropist.

How does it become a man to behave toward this American government to-day? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government also.

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. But almost all say that such is not the case now. But such was the case, they think, in the Revolution of '75. If one were to tell me that this was a bad government because it taxed certain foreign commodities brought to its ports, it is most probable that I should not make an ado about it, for I can do without them. All machines have their friction; and possibly this does enough good to counterbalance the evil. At any rate, it is a great evil to make a stir about it. But when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such

Digitized by Google

a machine any longer. In other words, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is the fact that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army.

Paley, a common authority with many on moral questions, in his chapter on the "Duty of Submission to Civil Government," resolves all civil obligation into expediency; and he proceeds to say, "that so long as the interest of the whole society requires it, that is, so long as the established government cannot be resisted or changed without public inconveniency, it is the will of God that the established government be obeyed, and no longer. . . . This principle being admitted, the justice of every particular case of resistance is reduced to a computation of the quantity of the danger and grievance on the one side, and of the probability and expense of redressing it on the other." Of this, he says, every man shall judge for himself. But Paley appears never to have contemplated those cases to which the rule of expediency does not apply, in which a people, as well as an individual, must do justice, cost what it may. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself. This, according to Paley, would be inconvenient. But he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it. This people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.

In their practice, nations agree with Paley; but does any one think that Massachusetts does exactly what is right at the present crisis?

> A drab of state, a cloth-o'-silver slut,
> To have her train borne up, and her soul trail in the dirt.

Practically speaking, the opponents to a reform in Massachusetts are not a hundred thousand politicians at the South, but a hundred thousand merchants and farmers here, who

Digitized by Google

are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico, *cost what it may*. I quarrel not with far-off foes, but with those who, near at home, co-operate with, and do the bidding of, those far away, and without whom the latter would be harmless. We are accustomed to say that the mass of men are unprepared; but improvement is slow, because the few are not materially wiser or better than the many. It is not so important that many should be as good as you, as that there be some absolute goodness somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump. There are thousands who are *in opinion* opposed to slavery and to the war, and who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them; who, esteeming themselves children of Washington and Franklin, sit down with their hands in their pockets, and say that they know not what to do, and do nothing; who even postpone the question of freedom to the question of free-trade, and quietly read the prices-current along with the latest advices from Mexico, after dinner, and, it may be, fall asleep over them both. What is the price-current of an honest man and patriot to-day? They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect. They will wait, well disposed, for others to remedy the evil, that they may no longer have it to regret. At most, they give only a cheap vote, and a feeble countenance and God-speed, to the right, as it goes by them. There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to one virtuous man. But it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than with the temporary guardian of it.

All voting is a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions; and betting naturally accompanies it. The character of the voters is not staked. I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right; but I am not vitally concerned that that right should prevail. I am willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency. Even voting *for the right* is *doing* nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy

Digitized by Google

of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men. When the majority shall at length vote for the abolition of slavery, it will be because they are indifferent to slavery, or because there is but little slavery left to be abolished by their vote. *They* will then be the only slaves. Only *his* vote can hasten the abolition of slavery who asserts his own freedom by his vote.

I hear of a convention to be held at Baltimore, or elsewhere, for the selection of a candidate for the Presidency, made up chiefly of editors, and men who are politicians by profession; but I think, what is it to any independent, intelligent, and respectable man what decision they may come to? Shall we not have the advantage of his wisdom and honesty, nevertheless? Can we not count upon some independent votes? Are there not many individuals in the country who do not attend conventions? But no: I find that the respectable man, so called, has immediately drifted from his position, and despairs of his country, when his country has more reason to despair of him. He forthwith adopts one of the candidates thus selected as the only *available* one, thus proving that he is himself *available* for any purposes of the demagogue. His vote is of no more worth than that of any unprincipled foreigner or hireling native, who may have been bought. O for a man who is a *man,* and, as my neighbor says, has a bone in his back which you cannot pass your hand through! Our statistics are at fault: the population has been returned too large. How many *men* are there to a square thousand miles in this country? Hardly one. Does not America offer any inducement for men to settle here? The American has dwindled into an Odd Fellow,— one who may be known by the development of his organ of gregariousness, and a manifest lack of intellect and cheerful self-reliance; whose first and chief concern, on coming into the world, is to see that the Almshouses are in good repair; and, before yet he has lawfully donned the virile garb, to collect a fund for the support of the widows and orphans that may be; who, in short, ventures to live only by the aid of the Mutual Insurance company, which has promised to bury him decently.

Digitized by Google

It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too. See what gross inconsistency is tolerated. I have heard some of my townsmen say, "I should like to have them order me out to help put down an insurrection of the slaves, or to march to Mexico; — see if I would go"; and yet these very men have each, directly by their allegiance, and so indirectly, at least, by their money, furnished a substitute. The soldier is applauded who refuses to serve in an unjust war by those who do not refuse to sustain the unjust government which makes the war; is applauded by those whose own act and authority he disregards and sets at naught; as if the State were penitent to that degree that it hired one to scourge it while it sinned, but not to that degree that it left off sinning for a moment. Thus, under the name of Order and Civil Government, we are all made at last to pay homage to and support our own meanness. After the first blush of sin comes its indifference; and from immoral it becomes, as it were, *un*moral, and not quite unnecessary to that life which we have made.

The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most disinterested virtue to sustain it. The slight reproach to which the virtue of patriotism is commonly liable, the noble are most likely to incur. Those who, while they disapprove of the character and measures of a government, yield to it their allegiance and support are undoubtedly its most conscientious supporters, and so frequently the most serious obstacles to reform. Some are petitioning the State to dissolve the Union, to disregard the requisitions of the President. Why do they not dissolve it themselves,— the union between themselves and the State,— and refuse to pay their quota into its treasury? Do not they stand in the same relation to the State that the

Digitized by Google

State does to the Union? And have not the same reasons prevented the State from resisting the Union which have prevented them from resisting the State?

How can a man be satisfied to entertain an opinion merely and enjoy *it?* Is there any enjoyment in it, if his opinion is that he is aggrieved? If you are cheated out of a single dollar by your neighbor, you do not rest satisfied with knowing that you are cheated, or with saying that you are cheated, or even with petitioning him to pay you your due; but you take effectual steps at once to obtain the full amount, and see that you are never cheated again. Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divides states and churches, it divides families; ay, it divides the *individual*, separating the diabolical in him from the divine.

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy *is* worse than the evil. *It* makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wide minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and *do* better than it would have them? Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels?

One would think, that a deliberate and practical denial of its authority was the only offense never contemplated by government; else, why has it not assigned its definite, its suitable and proportionate penalty? If a man who has no property refuses but once to earn nine shillings for the State, he is put in prison for a period unlimited by any law that I know, and determined only by the discretion of those who placed him there; but if he should steal ninety times nine

Digitized by Google

shillings from the State, he is soon permitted to go at large again.

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth,— certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something; and because he cannot do *everything*, it is not necessary that he should do *something* wrong. It is not my business to be petitioning the Governor or the Legislature any more than it is theirs to petition me; and if they should not hear my petition, what should I do then? But in this case the State has provided no way: its very Constitution is the evil. This may seem to be harsh and stubborn and unconciliatory; but it is to treat with the utmost kindness and consideration the only spirit that can appreciate or deserves it. So is all change for the better, like birth and death, which convulse the body.

I do not hesitate to say, that those who call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the government of Massachusetts, and not wait till they constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them. I think that it is enough if they have God on their side, without waiting for that other one. Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already.

I meet this American government, or its representative, the

Digitized by Google

state government, directly, and face to face, once a year — no more — in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it; and it then says distinctly, Recognize me; and the simplest, the most effectual, and, in the present posture of affairs, the indispensablest mode of treating with it on this head, of expressing your little satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it then. My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with,— for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel,— and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government. How shall he ever know well what he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace, and see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action. I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name — if ten *honest* men only — ay, if *one* HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this co-partnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But we love better to talk about it: that we say is our mission. Reform keeps many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man. If my esteemed neighbor, the State's ambassador, who will devote his days to the settlement of the question of human rights in the Council Chamber, instead of being threatened with the prisons of Carolina, were to sit down the prisoner of Massachusetts, that State which is so anxious to foist the sin of slavery upon her sister,— though at present she can discover only an act of inhospitality to be the ground of a quarrel with her,—the Legislature would not wholly waive the subject the following winter.

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for

Digitized by Google

her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race, should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not *with* her, but *against* her,— the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceful revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

I have contemplated the imprisonment of the offender, rather than the seizure of his goods,— though both will serve the same purpose,— because they who assert the purest right, and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating prop-

Digitized by Google

erty. To such the State renders comparatively small service, and a slight tax is wont to appear exorbitant, particularly if they are obliged to earn it by special labor with their hands. If there were one who lived wholly without the use of money, the State itself would hesitate to demand it of him. But the rich man — not to make any invidious comparison — is always sold to the institution which makes him rich. Absolutely speaking, the more money the less virtue; for money comes between a man and his objects, and obtains them for him; and it was certainly no great virtue to obtain it. It puts to rest many questions which he would otherwise be taxed to answer; while the only new question which it puts is the hard but superfluous one, how to spend it. Thus his moral ground is taken from under his feet. The opportunities of living are diminished in proportion as what are called the "means" are increased. The best thing a man can do for his culture when he is rich is to endeavor to carry out those schemes which he entertained when he was poor. Christ answered the Herodians according to their condition. "Show me the tribute-money," said he; — and one took a penny out of his pocket; — if you use money which has the image of Cæsar on it, and which he has made current and valuable, that is, *if you are men of the State,* and gladly enjoy the advantages of Cæsar's government, then pay him back some of his own when he demands it. "Render therefore to Cæsar that which is Cæsar's, and to God those things which are God's,"— leaving them no wiser than before as to which was which; for they did not wish to know.

When I converse with the freest of my neighbors, I perceive that, whatever they may say about the magnitude and seriousness of the question, and their regard for the public tranquillity, the long and the short of the matter is, that they cannot spare the protection of the existing government, and they dread the consequences to their property and families of disobedience to it. For my own part, I should not like to think that I ever rely on the protection of the State. But, if I deny the authority of the State when it presents its tax-bill, it will soon take and waste all my property, and so harass me and my children without end. This is hard. This makes

Digitized by Google

it impossible for a man to live honestly, and at the same time comfortably, in outward respects. It will not be worth the while to accumulate property; that would be sure to go again. You must hire or squat somewhere, and raise but a small crop, and eat that soon. You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs. A man may grow rich in Turkey even, if he will be in all respects a good subject of the Turkish government. Confucius said: "If a state is governed by the principles of reason, poverty and misery are subjects of shame; if a state is not governed by the principles of reason, riches and honors are the subjects of shame." No: until I want the protection of Massachusetts to be extended to me in some distant Southern port, where my liberty is endangered, or until I am bent solely on building up an estate at home by peaceful enterprise, I can afford to refuse allegiance to Massachusetts, and her right to my property and life. It costs me less in every sense to incur the penalty of disobedience to the State than it would to obey. I should feel as if I were worth less in that case.

Some years ago the State met me in behalf of the Church, and commanded me to pay a certain sum toward the support of a clergyman whose preaching my father attended, but never I myself. "Pay," it said, "or be locked up in the jail." I declined to pay. But, unfortunately, another man saw fit to pay it. I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster; for I was not the State's schoolmaster, but I supported myself by voluntary subscriptions. I did not see why the lyceum should not present its tax-bill, and have the State to back its demand, as well as the Church. However, at the request of the selectmen, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing:—"Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined." This I gave to the town clerk; and he has it. The State, having thus learned that I did not wish to be regarded as a member of that church, has never made a like demand on me since; though it said that it must adhere to its

Digitized by Google

original presumption that time. If I had known how to name them, I should then have signed off in detail from all the societies which I never signed on to; but I did not know where to find a complete list.

I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and *they* were really all that was dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish my body; just as boys, if they cannot come at some person against whom they have a spite, will abuse his dog. I saw that the State was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it.

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude? They only can force me

Digitized by Google

who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of *men* being *forced* to live this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life were that to live? When I meet a government which says to me, "Your money or your life," why should I be in haste to give it my money? It may be in a great strait, and not know what to do: I cannot help that. It must help itself; do as I do. It is not worth the while to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer. I perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man.

. . . . . .

I have never declined paying the highway tax, because I am as desirous of being a good neighbor as I am of being a bad subject; and as for supporting schools, I am doing my part to educate my fellow-countrymen now. It is for no particular item in the tax-bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. I do not care to trace the course of my dollar, if I could, till it buys a man or a musket to shoot one with,— the dollar is innocent, but I am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance. In fact, I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can, as is usual in such cases.

If others pay the tax which is demanded of me, from a sympathy with the State, they do but what they have already done in their own case, or rather they abet injustice to a greater extent than the State requires. If they pay the tax from a mistaken interest in the individual taxed, to save his property, or prevent his going to jail, it is because they have not considered wisely how far they let their private feelings interfere with the public good.

This, then, is my position at present. But one cannot be

Digitized by Google

too much on his guard in such a case, lest his action be biased by obstinacy or an undue regard for the opinions of men. Let him see that he does only what belongs to himself and to the hour.

I think sometimes, Why, this people mean well, they are only ignorant; they would do better if they knew how: why give your neighbors this pain to treat you as they are not inclined to? But I think again, This is no reason why I should do as they do, or permit others to suffer much greater pain of a different kind. Again, I sometimes say to myself, When many millions of men, without heat, without ill-will, without personal feeling of any kind, demand of you a few shillings only, without possibility, such is their constitution, of retracing or altering their present demand, and without the possibility, on your side, of appeal to any other millions, why expose yourself to this overwhelming brute force? You do not resist cold and hunger, the winds and the waves, thus obstinately; you quietly submit to a thousand similar necessities. You do not put your head into the fire. But just in proportion as I regard this as not wholly a brute force, but partly a human force, and consider that I have relations to those millions as to so many millions of men, and not of mere brute or inanimate things, I see that appeal is possible, first and instantaneously, from them to the Maker of them, and, secondly, from them to themselves. But if I put my head deliberately into the fire, there is no appeal to fire or to the Maker of fire, and I have only myself to blame. If I could convince myself that I have any right to be satisfied with men as they are, and to treat them accordingly, and not according, in some respects, to my requisitions and expectations of what they and I ought to be, then, like a good Mussulman and fatalist, I should endeavor to be satisfied with things as they are, and say it is the will of God. And, above all, there is this difference between resisting this and a purely brute or natural force, that I can resist this with some effect; but I cannot expect, like Orpheus, to change the nature of the rocks and trees and beasts.

I do not wish to quarrel with any man or nation. I do not wish to split hairs, to make fine distinctions, or set my-

Digitized by Google

self up as better than my neighbors. I seek rather, I may say, even an excuse for conforming to the laws of the land. I am but too ready to conform to them. Indeed, I have reason to suspect myself on this head; and each year, as the tax-gatherer comes round, I find myself disposed to review the acts and position of the general and State governments, and the spirit of the people, to discover a pretext for conformity.

> We must affect our country as our parents,
> And if at any time we alienate
> Our love or industry from doing it honor,
> We must respect effects and teach the soul
> Matter of conscience and religion,
> And not desire of rule or benefit.

I believe that the State will soon be able to take all my work of this sort out of my hands, and then I shall be no better a patriot than my fellow-countrymen. Seen from a lower point of view, the Constitution, with all its faults, is very good; the law and the courts are very respectable; even this State and this American government are, in many respects, very admirable, and rare things, to be thankful for, such as a great many have described them; but seen from a point of view a little higher, they are what I have described them; seen from a higher still, and the highest, who shall say what they are, or that they are worth looking at or thinking of at all?

However, the government does not concern me much, and I shall bestow the fewest possible thoughts on it. It is not many moments that I live under a government, even in this world. If a man is thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free, that which *is not* never for a long time appearing *to be* to him, unwise rulers or reformers cannot fatally interrupt him.

I know that most men think differently from myself; but those whose lives are by profession devoted to the study of these or kindred subjects content me as little as any. Statesmen and legislators, standing so completely within the institution, never distinctly and nakedly behold it. They speak

Digitized by Google

of moving society, but have no resting-place without it. They may be men of a certain experience and discrimination, and have no doubt invented ingenious and even useful systems, for which we sincerely thank them; but all their wit and usefulness lie within certain not very wide limits. They are wont to forget that the world is not governed by policy and expediency. . . . The lawyer's truth is not Truth, but consistency or a consistent expediency. Truth is always in harmony with herself, and is not concerned chiefly to reveal the justice that may consist with wrong-doing. . . .

They who know of no purer sources of truth, who have traced up its stream no higher, stand, and wisely stand, by the Bible and the Constitution, and drink at it there with reverence and humility; but they who behold where it comes trickling into this lake or that pool, gird up their loins once more, and continue their pilgrimage toward its fountain-head. . . . For eighteen hundred years, though perchance I have no right to say it, the New Testament has been written; yet where is the legislator who has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of the light which it sheds on the science of legislation?

The authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to,— for I will cheerfully obey those who know and can do better than I, and in many things even those who neither know nor can do so well,— is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it. The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the basis of the empire. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I

Digitized by Google

please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.

Digitized by Google

HERBERT SPENCER

(1820–1903)

THE RIGHT TO IGNORE THE STATE[1]

1. As a corollary to the proposition that all institutions must be subordinated to the law of equal freedom, we cannot choose but admit the right of the citizen to adopt a condition of voluntary outlawry. If every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man, then he is free to drop connection with the State,— to relinquish its protection and to refuse paying toward its support. It is self-evident that in so behaving he in no way trenches upon the liberty of others; for his position is a passive one, and whilst passive he cannot become an aggressor. It is equally self-evident that he cannot be compelled to continue one of a political corporation without a breach of the moral law, seeing that citizenship involves payment of taxes; and the taking away of a man's property against his will is an infringement of his rights. Government being simply an agent employed in common by a number of individuals to secure to them certain advantages, the very nature of the connection implies that it is for each to say whether he will employ such an agent or not. If any one of them determines to ignore this mutual-safety confederation, nothing can be said except that he loses all claim to its good offices, and exposes himself to the danger of

[1] From the first edition of "Social Statics," published in London in 1850. When, after ten years, the first small edition was exhausted, the book was allowed to go out of print in England; but for some twenty-five years thereafter Spencer's publishers continued to supply the English market by importing editions in sheets printed from the plates of Messrs. Appletons' American reprint. In 1892 Spencer published in both England and America a volume of excerpts from "Social Statics," in which the chapter here given, along with about half the remaining contents of the original work, did not appear.

Digitized by Google

maltreatment,— a thing he is quite at liberty to do if he likes. He cannot be coerced into political combination without a breach of the law of equal freedom; he *can* withdraw from it without committing any such breach; and he has therefore a right so to withdraw.

2. "No human laws are of any validity if contrary to the law of nature; and such of them as are valid derive all their force and all their authority mediately or immediately from this original." Thus writes Blackstone, to whom let all honor be given for having so far outseen the ideas of his time,— and, indeed, we may say of our time. A good antidote, this, for those political superstitions which so widely prevail. A good check upon that sentiment of power-worship which still misleads us by magnifying the prerogatives of constitutional governments as it once did those of monarchs. Let men learn that a legislature is *not* "our God upon earth," though, by the authority they ascribe to it and the things they expect from it, they would seem to think it is. Let them learn rather that it is an institution serving a purely temporary purpose, whose power, when not stolen, is at the best borrowed.

Nay, indeed, have we not seen that government is essentially immoral? Is it not the offspring of evil, bearing about it all the marks of its parentage? Does it not exist because crime exists? Is it not strong, or, as we say, despotic, when crime is great? Is there not more liberty — that is, less government — as crime diminishes? And must not government cease when crime ceases, for very lack of objects on which to perform its functions? Not only does magisterial power exist *because* of evil, but it exists *by* evil. Violence is employed to maintain it; and all violence involves criminality. Soldiers, policemen, and jailers; swords, batons, and fetters,— are instruments for inflicting pain; and all infliction of pain is in the abstract wrong. The State employs evil weapons to subjugate evil, and is alike contaminated by the objects with which it deals and the means by which it works. Morality cannot recognize it; for morality, being simply a statement of the perfect law, can give no countenance to anything growing out of, and living by,

Digitized by Google

breaches of that law. Wherefore legislative authority can never be ethical — must always be conventional merely.

Hence there is a certain inconsistency in the attempt to determine the right position, structure, and conduct of a government by appeal to the first principles of rectitude. For, as just pointed out, the acts of an institution which is in both nature and origin imperfect cannot be made to square with the perfect law. All that we can do is to ascertain, firstly, in what attitude a legislature must stand to the community to avoid being by its mere existence an embodied wrong; secondly, in what manner it must be constituted so as to exhibit the least incongruity with the moral law; and, thirdly, to what sphere its actions must be limited to prevent it from multiplying those breaches of equity it is set up to prevent.

The first condition to be conformed to before a legislature can be established without violating the law of equal freedom is the acknowledgement of the right now under discussion — the right to ignore the State.

3. Upholders of pure despotism may fitly believe State-control to be unlimited and unconditional. They who assert that men are made for governments and not governments for men may consistently hold that no one can remove himself beyond the pale of political organization. But they who maintain that the people are the only legitimate source of power — that legislative authority is not original, but deputed — cannot deny the right to ignore the State without entangling themselves in an absurdity.

For, if legislative authority is deputed, it follows that those from whom it proceeds are the masters of those on whom it is conferred: it follows further that as masters they confer the said authority voluntarily: and this implies that they may give or withhold it as they please. To call that deputed which is wrenched from men whether they will or not is nonsense. But what is here true of all collectively is equally true of each separately. As a government can rightly act for the people only when empowered by them, so also can it rightly act for the individual only when empowered by him. If A, B, and C debate whether they shall employ an agent to

Digitized by Google

perform for them a certain service, and if, whilst A and B agree to do so, C dissents, C cannot equitably be made a party to the agreement in spite of himself. And this must be equally true of thirty as of three: and if of thirty why not of three hundred, or three thousand, or three millions?

4. Of the political superstitions lately alluded to, none is so universally diffused as the notion that majorities are omnipotent. Under the impression that the preservation of order will ever require power to be wielded by some party, the moral sense of our time feels that such power cannot rightly be conferred on any but the largest moiety of society. It interprets literally the saying that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," and, transferring to the one the sacredness attached to the other, it concludes that from the will of the people — that is, of the majority — there can be no appeal. Yet is this belief entirely erroneous.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that, struck by some Malthusian panic, a legislature duly representing public opinion were to enact that all children born during the next ten years should be drowned. Does any one think such an enactment would be warrantable? If not, there is evidently a limit to the power of a majority. Suppose, again, that of two races living together — Celts and Saxons, for example — the most numerous determined to make the others their slaves. Would the authority of the greatest number be in such case valid? If not, there is something to which its authority must be subordinate. Suppose, once more, that all men having incomes under £50 a year were to resolve upon reducing every income above that amount to their own standard, and appropriating the excess for public purposes. Could their resolution be justified? If not, it must be a third time confessed that there is a law to which the popular voice must defer. What, then, is that law, if not the law of pure equity — the law of equal freedom? These restraints, which all would put to the will of the majority, are exactly the restraints set up by that law. We deny the right of a majority to murder, to enslave, or to rob, simply because murder, enslaving, and robbery are violations of that law — violations too gross to be overlooked. But if great violations of it are wrong, so

Digitized by Google

also are smaller ones. If the will of the many cannot supersede the first principle of morality in these cases, neither can it in any. So that, however insignificant the minority, and however trifling the proposed trespass against their rights, no such trespass is permissible.

When we have made our constitution purely democratic, thinks to himself the earnest reformer, we shall have brought government into harmony with absolute justice. Such a faith, though perhaps needful for the age, is a very erroneous one. By no process can coercion be made equitable. The freest form of government is only the least objectionable form. The rule of the many by the few we call tyranny: the rule of the few by the many is tyranny also, only of a less intense kind. "You shall do as we will, and not as you will," is in either case the declaration; and if the hundred make it to the ninety-nine, instead of the ninety-nine to the hundred, it is only a fraction less immoral. Of two such parties, whichever fulfills this declaration necessarily breaks the law of equal freedom: the only difference being that by the one it is broken in the persons of ninety-nine, whilst by the other it is broken in the persons of a hundred. And the merit of the democratic form of government consists solely in this, that it trespasses against the smaller number.

The very existence of majorities and minorities is indicative of an immoral state. The man whose character harmonizes with the moral law, we found to be one who can obtain complete happiness without diminishing the happiness of his fellows. But the enactment of public arrangements by vote implies a society consisting of men otherwise constituted — implies that the desires of some cannot be satisfied without sacrificing the desires of others — implies that in the pursuit of their happiness the majority inflict a certain amount of *un*happiness on the minority — implies, therefore, organic immorality. Thus, from another point of view, we again perceive that even in its most equitable form it is impossible for government to dissociate itself from evil; and further, that unless the right to ignore the State is recognized, its acts must be essentially criminal.

5. That a man is free to abandon the benefits and throw

Digitized by Google

off the burdens of citizenship, may indeed be inferred from the admissions of existing authorities and of current opinion. Unprepared as they probably are for so extreme a doctrine as the one here maintained, the radicals of our day yet unwittingly profess their belief in a maxim which obviously embodies this doctrine. Do we not continually hear them quote Blackstone's assertion that "no subject of England can be constrained to pay any aids or taxes even for the defense of the realm or the support of government, but such as are imposed by his own consent, or that of his representatives in parliament"? And what does this mean? It means, say they, that every man should have a vote. True: but it means much more. If there is any sense in words, it is a distinct enunciation of the very right now contended for. In affirming that a man may not be taxed unless he has directly or indirectly given his consent, it affirms that he may refuse to be so taxed; and to refuse to be taxed is to cut all connection with the State. Perhaps it will be said that this consent is not a specific, but a general one, and that the citizen is understood to have assented to everything his representative may do, when he voted for him. But suppose he did not vote for him; and on the contrary did all in his power to get elected some one holding opposite views — what then? The reply will probably be that, by taking part in such an election, he tacitly agreed to abide by the decision of the majority. And how if he did not vote at all? Why then he cannot justly complain of any tax, seeing that he made no protest against its imposition. So, curiously enough, it seems that he gave his consent in whatever way he acted — whether he said yes, whether he said no, or whether he remained neuter! A rather awkward doctrine, this. Here stands an unfortunate citizen who is asked if he will pay money for a certain proffered advantage; and whether he employs the only means of expressing his refusal or does not employ it, we are told that he practically agrees, if only the number of others who agree is greater than the number of those who dissent. And thus we are introduced to the novel principle that A's consent to a thing is not determined by what A says, but by what B may happen to say!

Digitized by Google

It is for those who quote Blackstone to choose between this absurdity and the doctrine above set forth. Either his maxim implies the right to ignore the State, or it is sheer nonsense.

6. There is a strange heterogeneity in our political faiths. Systems that have had their day, and are beginning here and there to let the daylight through, are patched with modern notions utterly unlike in quality and color; and men gravely display these systems, wear them, and walk about in them, quite unconscious of their grotesqueness. This transition state of ours, partaking as it does equally of the past and the future, breeds hybrid theories exhibiting the oddest union of bygone despotism and coming freedom. Here are types of the old organization curiously disguised by germs of the new — peculiarities showing adaptation to a preceding state modified by rudiments that prophesy of something to come — making altogether so chaotic a mixture of relationships that there is no saying to what class these births of the age should be referred.

As ideas must of necessity bear the stamp of the time, it is useless to lament the contentment with which these incongruous beliefs are held. Otherwise it would seem unfortunate that men do not pursue to the end the trains of reasoning which have led to these partial modifications. In the present case, for example, consistency would force them to admit that, on other points besides the one just noticed, they hold opinions and use arguments in which the right to ignore the State is involved.

For what is the meaning of Dissent? The time was when a man's faith and his mode of worship were as much determinable by law as his secular acts; and, according to provisions extant in our statute-book, are so still. Thanks to the growth of a Protestant spirit, however, we have ignored the State in this matter — wholly in theory, and partly in practice. But how have we done so? By assuming an attitude which, if consistently maintained, implies a right to ignore the State entirely. Observe the positions of the two parties. "This is your creed," says the legislator; "you must believe and openly profess what is here set down for you." "I shall not do anything of the kind," answers the

Digitized by Google

nonconformist; "I will go to prison rather." "Your religious ordinances," pursues the legislator, "shall be such as we have prescribed. You shall attend the churches we have endowed, and adopt the ceremonies used in them." "Nothing shall induce me to do so," is the reply; "I altogether deny your power to dictate to me in such matters, and mean to resist to the uttermost." "Lastly," adds the legislator, "we shall require you to pay such sums of money toward the support of these religious institutions as we may see fit to ask." "Not a farthing will you have from me," exclaims our sturdy Independent: "even did I believe in the doctrines of your church (which I do not), I should still rebel against your interference; and if you take my property it shall be by force and under protest."

What now does this proceeding amount to when regarded in the abstract? It amounts to an assertion by the individual of the right to exercise one of his faculties — the religious sentiment — without let or hindrance, and with no limit save that set up by the equal claims of others. And what is meant by ignoring the State? Simply an assertion of the right similarly to exercise *all* the faculties. The one is just an expansion of the other — rests on the same footing with the other — must stand or fall with the other. Men do indeed speak of civil and religious liberty as different things: but the distinction is quite arbitrary. They are parts of the same whole, and cannot philosophically be separated.

"Yes they can," interposes an objector; "assertion of the one is imperative as being a religious duty. The liberty to worship God in the way that seems to him right is a liberty without which a man cannot fulfill what he believes to be Divine commands, and therefore conscience requires him to maintain it." True enough; but how if the same can be asserted of all other liberty? How if maintenance of this also turns out to be a matter of conscience? Have we not seen that human happiness is the Divine will — that only by exercising our faculties is this happiness obtainable — and that it is impossible to exercise them without freedom? And if this freedom for the exercise of faculties is a condition without which the Divine will cannot be fulfilled, the preservation

Digitized by Google

of it is, by our objector's own showing, a duty. Or, in other words, it appears not only that the maintenance of liberty of action *may* be a point of conscience, but that it *ought* to be one. And thus we are clearly shown that the claims to ignore the State in religious and in secular matters are in essence identical.

The other reason commonly assigned for nonconformity admits of similar treatment. Besides resisting State dictation in the abstract, the dissenter resists it from disapprobation of the doctrines taught. No legislative injunction will make him adopt what he considers an erroneous belief; and, bearing in mind his duty toward his fellow-men, he refuses to help through the medium of his purse in disseminating this erroneous belief. The position is perfectly intelligible. But it is one which either commits its adherents to civil nonconformity also, or leaves them in a dilemma. For why do they refuse to be instrumental in spreading error? Because error is adverse to human happiness. And on what ground is any piece of secular legislation disapproved? For the same reason — because thought adverse to human happiness. How then can it be shown that the State ought to be resisted in the one case and not in the other? Will any one deliberately assert that if a government demands money from us to aid in *teaching* what we think will produce evil, we ought to refuse it, but that if the money is for the purpose of *doing* what we think will produce evil, we ought not to refuse it? Yet such is the hopeful proposition which those have to maintain who recognize the right to ignore the State in religious matters, but deny it in civil matters.

7. The substance of this chapter once more reminds us of the incongruity between a perfect law and an imperfect state. The practicability of the principle here laid down varies directly as social morality. In a thoroughly vicious community its admission would be productive of anarchy. In a completely virtuous one its admission will be both innocuous and inevitable. Progress toward a condition of social health — a condition, that is, in which the remedial measures of legislation will no longer be needed — is progress toward a condition in which those remedial measures will be cast aside, and

Digitized by Google

the authority prescribing them disregarded. The two changes are of necessity coördinate. That moral sense whose supremacy will make society harmonious and government unnecessary is the same moral sense which will then make each man assert his freedom even to the extent of ignoring the State — is the same moral sense which, by deterring the majority from coercing the minority, will eventually render government impossible. And as what are merely different manifestations of the same sentiment must bear a constant ratio to each other, the tendency to repudiate governments will increase only at the same rate that governments become needless.

Let not any be alarmed, therefore, at the promulgation of the foregoing doctrine. There are many changes yet to be passed through before it can begin to exercise much influence. Probably a long time will elapse before the right to ignore the State will be generally admitted, even in theory. It will be still longer before it receives legislative recognition. And even then there will be plenty of checks upon the premature exercise of it. A sharp experience will sufficiently instruct those who may too soon abandon legal protection. Whilst, in the majority of men, there is such a love of tried arrangements, and so great a dread of experiments, that they will probably not act upon this right until long after it is safe to do so.

Digitized by Google

LEO TOLSTOY

(1828–1910)

APPEAL TO SOCIAL REFORMERS[1]

In my "Appeal to the Working People" I expressed the opinion that if the working-men are to free themselves from oppression it is necessary that they should themselves cease to live as they now live, struggling with their neighbors for their personal welfare, and that, according to the Gospel rule, man should "act towards others as he desires that others should act towards himself."

The method I had suggested called forth, as I expected, one and the same condemnation from people of the most opposite views.

"It is an Utopia, unpractical. To wait for the liberation of men who are suffering from oppression and violence until they all become virtuous would mean — whilst recognising the existing evil — to doom oneself to inaction."

Therefore I would like to say a few words as to why I believe this idea is not so unpractical as it appears, but, on the contrary, deserves that more attention be directed to it than to all the other methods proposed by scientific men for the improvement of the social order. I would like to say these words to those who sincerely — not in words, but in deeds — desire to serve their neighbors. It is to such people that I now address myself.

I

The ideals of social life which direct the activity of men change, and together with them the order of human life also

[1] From a volume of Tolstoy's miscellaneous writings edited by Helen Chrouschoff Matheson and entitled "Social Evils and their Remedy" (London: Methuen & Co.). It is stated therein that "the translation is that used by the Russian Free Press."

Digitized by Google

changes. There was a time when the ideal of social life was complete animal freedom, according to which one portion of mankind, as far as they were able, devoured the other, both in the direct and in the figurative sense. Then followed a time when the social ideal became the power of one man, and men deified their rulers, and not only willingly but enthusiastically submitted to them — Egypt, Rome: *"Morituri te salutant."* Next, people recognised as their ideal an organisation of life in which power was recognised, not for its own sake, but for the good organisation of men's lives. Attempts for the realisation of such an ideal were at one time a universal monarchy, then a universal Church uniting various States and directing them; then came forth the ideal of representation, then of a Republic, with or without universal suffrage. At the present time it is regarded that this ideal can be realised through an economic organisation wherein all the instruments of labor will cease to be private property, and will become the property of the whole nation.

However different be all these ideals, yet, to introduce them into life, power was always postulated — that is, coercive power, which forces men to obey established laws. The same is also postulated now.

It is supposed that the realisation of the greatest welfare for all is attained by certain people (according to the Chinese teaching, the most virtuous; according to the European teaching, the anointed, or elected by the people) who, being entrusted with power, will establish and support the organisation which will secure the greatest possible safety of the citizens against mutual encroachments on each other's labor and on freedom of life. Not only those who recognise the existing State organisation as a necessary condition of human life, but also revolutionists and Socialists, though they regard the existing State organisation as subject to alteration, nevertheless recognise power, that is, the right and possibility of some to compel others to obey established laws, as the necessary condition of social order.

Thus it has been from ancient times, and still continues to be. But those who were compelled by force to submit to certain regulations did not always regard these regulations

Digitized by Google

as the best, and therefore often revolted against those in power, deposed them, and in place of the old order established a new one, which, according to their opinion, better ensured the welfare of the people. Yet as those possessed of power always became depraved by this possession, and therefore used their power not so much for the common welfare as for their own personal interests, the new power has always been similar to the old one, and often still more unjust.

Thus it has been when those who had revolted against existing authority overcame it. On the other hand, when victory remained on the side of the existing power, then the latter, triumphant in self-protection, always increased the means of its defence, and became yet more injurious to the liberty of its citizens.

Thus it has always been, both in the past and the present, and there is special instructiveness in the way this has taken place in our European world during the whole of the 19th century. In the first half of this century, revolutions had been for the most part successful; but the new authorities who replaced the old ones, Napoleon I., Charles X., Napoleon III., did not increase the liberty of the citizens. In the second half, after the year 1848, all attempts at revolution were suppressed by the Governments; and owing to former revolutions and attempted new ones, the Governments entrenched themselves in greater and greater self-defence, and — thanks to the technical inventions of the last century, which have furnished men with hitherto unknown powers over nature and over each other — they have increased their authority, and towards the end of last century have developed it to such a degree that it has become impossible for the people to struggle against it. The Governments have not only seized enormous riches collected from the people, have not only disciplined artfully levied troops, but have also grasped all the spiritual means of influencing the masses, the direction of the Press and of religious development, and, above all, of education. These means have been so organized, and have become so powerful, that since the year 1848 there has been no successful attempt at revolution in Europe.

Digitized by Google

II

This phenomenon is quite new and is absolutely peculiar to our time. However powerful were Nero, Khengiz-Khan, or Charles the Great, they could not suppress risings on the borders of their domains, and still less could they direct the spiritual activity of their subjects, their education, scientific and moral, and their religious tendencies; whereas now all these means are in the hands of the Governments.

It is not only the Parisian "macadam" which, having replaced the previous stone roadways, renders barricades impossible during revolutions in Paris, but the same kind of "macadam" during the latter half of the 19th century has appeared in all the branches of State government. The secret police, the system of spies, bribery of the Press, railways, telegraphs, telephones, photography, prisons, fortifications, enormous riches, the education of the younger generations, and above all, the army, are in the hands of the Governments.

All is organised in such a way that the most incapable and unintelligent rulers (from the instinctive feeling of self-preservation) can prevent serious preparations for a rising, and can always, without any effort, suppress those weak attempts at open revolt which from time to time are still undertaken by belated revolutionists who, by these attempts, only increase the power of Governments. At present the only means for overcoming Governments lies in this: that the army, composed of the people, having recognised the injustice, cruelty, and injury of the Government towards themselves, should cease to support it. But in this respect also, the Governments, knowing that their chief power is in the army, have so organised its mobilisation and its discipline that no propaganda amongst the people can snatch the army out of the hands of the Government. No man, whatever his political convictions, who is serving in the army, and has been subjected to that hypnotic breaking-in which is called discipline, can, whilst in the ranks, avoid obeying commands, just as an eye cannot avoid winking when a blow is aimed at it.

Digitized by Google

Boys of the age of twenty, who are enlisted and educated in the false ecclesiastic or materialistic and moreover "patriotic" spirit, cannot refuse to serve, as children who are sent to school cannot refuse to obey. Having entered the service, these youths, whatever their convictions, are — thanks to artful discipline, elaborated during centuries — inevitably transformed in one year into submissive tools in the hands of the authorities. If rare cases occur — one out of ten thousand — of refusals of military service, this is accomplished only by so-called "sectarians" who act thus out of religious convictions unrecognised by the Governments. Therefore, at present, in the European world — if only the Governments desire to retain their power, and they cannot but desire this, because the abolition of power would involve the downfall of the rulers — no serious rising can be organised; and if any thing of the kind be organised it will always be suppressed, and will have no other consequences than the destruction of many light-minded individuals and the increase of governmental power. This may not be seen by revolutionists and Socialists who, following out-lived traditions, are carried away by strife, which for some has become a definite profession; but it cannot fail to be recognised by all those who freely consider historical events.

This phenomenon is quite new, and therefore the activity of those who desire to alter the existing order should conform with this new position of existing powers in the European world.

III

The struggle between the State and the people which has lasted during long ages at first produced the substitution of one power for another, of this one by yet a third, and so on. But in our European world from the middle of last century the power of the existing Governments, thanks to the technical improvements of our time, has been furnished with such means of defence that strife with it has become impossible. In proportion as this power has attained greater and greater degree it has demonstrated more and more its inconsistency:

Digitized by Google

there has become ever more evident that inner contradiction which consists in combination of the idea of a beneficent power and of violence, which constitutes the essence of power. It became obvious that power, which, to be beneficent, should be in the hands of the very best men, was always in the hands of the worst; as the best men, owing to the very nature of power — consisting in the use of violence towards one's neighbor — could not desire power, and therefore never obtained or retained it.

This contradiction is so self-evident that it would seem everyone must have always seen it. Yet such are the pompous surroundings of power, the fear which it inspires, and the inertia of tradition, that centuries and indeed thousands of years passed before men understood their error. Only in latter days have men begun to understand that notwithstanding the solemnity with which power always drapes itself its essence consists in threatening people with the loss of property, liberty, life, and in realising these threats; and that, therefore, those who, like kings, emperors, ministers, judges, and others, devote their life to this activity without any object except the desire to retain their advantageous position, not only are not the best, but are always the worst men, and being such, cannot by their power contribute to the welfare of humanity, but on the contrary have always represented, and still represent, one of the principal causes of the social calamities of mankind. Therefore power, which formerly elicited in the people enthusiasm and devotion, at present calls forth amongst the greater and best portion of mankind not only indifference, but often contempt and hatred. This more enlightened section of mankind now understands that all that pompous show with which power surrounds itself is naught else than the red shirt and velvet trousers of the executioner, which distinguishes him from other convicts because he takes upon himself the most immoral and infamous work — that of executing people.

Power, being conscious of this attitude towards itself continually growing amongst the people, in our days no longer leans upon the higher foundations of anointed right, popular election, or inborn virtue of the rulers, but rests solely upon

Digitized by Google

coercion. Resting thus merely on coercion, therefore, it still more loses the confidence of the people, and losing this confidence it is more and more compelled to have recourse to the seizure of all the activities of national life, and owing to this seizure it inspires greater and greater dissatisfaction.

IV

Power has become invincible, and rests no longer on the higher national foundations of anointed right, election, or representation, but on violence alone. At the same time the people cease to believe in power and to respect it, and they submit to it only because they cannot do otherwise.

Precisely since the middle of the last century, from the very time when power had simultaneously become invincible and lost its prestige, there begins to appear amongst the people the teaching that liberty — not that fantastical liberty which is preached by the adherents of coercion when they affirm that a man who is compelled, under fear of punishment, to fulfill the orders of other men, is free, but that only true liberty, which consists in every man being able to live and act according to his own judgment, to pay or not to pay taxes, to enter or not to enter the military service, to be friendly or inimical to neighboring nations — that such true liberty is incompatible with the power of certain men over others.

According to this teaching, power is not, as was formerly thought, something divine and majestic, neither is it an indispensable condition of social life, but is merely the result of the coarse violence of some men over others. Be the power in the hands of Louis XVI., or the Committee of National Defence, or the Directory, or the Consulate, or Napoleon, or Louis XVIII., or the Sultan, the President, the chief Mandarin, or the first Minister,— wheresoever it be, there will exist the power of certain men over others, and there will not be freedom, but there will be the oppression of one portion of mankind by another. Therefore power must be abolished.

But how to abolish it, and how, when it is abolished, to

Digitized by Google

arrange things so that, without the existence of power, men should not return to the savage state of coarse violence towards each other?

All anarchists — as the preachers of this teaching are called — quite uniformly answer the first question by recognising that if this power is to be really abolished it must be abolished not by force but by men's consciousness of its uselessness and evil. To the second question, as to how society should be organized without power, anarchists answer variously.

The Englishman Godwin, who lived at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, and the Frenchman Proudhon, who wrote in the middle of the last century, answer the first question by saying that for the abolition of power the consciousness of men is sufficient, that *the general welfare* (Godwin) and *justice* (Proudhon) are transgressed by power, and that if the conviction were dissseminated amongst the people that general welfare and justice can be realised only in the absence of power, then power would of itself disappear.

As to the second question, by what means will the order of a new society be ensured without power, both Godwin and Proudhon answer that people who are led by the consciousness of *general welfare* (according to Godwin) and of *justice* (according to Proudhon) will instinctively find the most universally rational and just forms of life.

Whereas other anarchists, such as Bakounine and Kropotkin, although they also recognise the consciousness in the masses of the harmfulness of power and its incompatibility with human progress, nevertheless as a means for its abolition regard revolution as possible, and even as necessary, for which revolution they recommend men to prepare. The second question they answer by the assertion that as soon as State organisation and property shall be abolished men will naturally combine in rational, free, and advantageous conditions of life.

To the question as to the means of abolishing power, the German Max Stirner and the American Tucker answer almost in the same way as the others. Both of them believe

Digitized by Google

that if men understood that the personal interest of each individual is a perfectly sufficient and legitimate guide for men's actions, and that power only impedes the full manifestation of this leading factor of human life, then power will perish of itself, both owing to disobedience of it and above all, as Tucker says, to non-participation in it. Their answer to the second question is, that men freed from the superstition and necessity of power and merely following their personal interests would of themselves combine into forms of life most adequate and advantageous for each.

All these teachings are perfectly correct in this — that if power is to be abolished, this can be accomplished in nowise by force, as power having abolished power will remain power; but that this abolition of power can be accomplished only by the elucidation in the consciousness of men of the truth that power is useless and harmful, and that men should neither obey it nor participate in it. This truth is incontrovertible: power can be abolished only by the rational consciousness of men. But in what should this consciousness consist? The anarchists believe that this consciousness can be founded upon considerations about common welfare, justice, progress, or the personal interests of men. But not to mention that all these factors are not in mutual agreement, the very definitions of what constitutes general welfare, justice, progress, or personal interest are understood by men in infinitely various ways. Therefore it is impossible to suppose that people who are not agreed amongst themselves, and who differently understand the bases on which they oppose power, could abolish power so firmly fixed and so ably defended. Moreover, the supposition that considerations about general welfare, justice, or the law of progress can suffice to secure that men, freed from coercion, but having no motive for sacrificing their personal welfare to the general welfare, should combine in just conditions without violating their mutual liberty, is yet more unfounded. The Utilitarian egotistical theory of Max Stirner and Tucker, who affirm that by each following his own personal interest just relations would be introduced between all, is not only arbitrary, but in com-

Digitized by Google

plete contradiction to what in reality has taken place and is taking place.

So that, whilst correctly recognising spiritual weapons as the only means of abolishing power, the anarchistic teaching, holding an irreligious materialistic life conception, does not possess this spiritual weapon, and is confined to conjectures and fancies which give the advocates of coercion the possibility of denying its true foundations, owing to the inefficiency of the suggested means of realising this teaching.

This spiritual weapon is simply the one long ago known to men, which has always destroyed power and always given those who used it complete and inalienable freedom. This weapon is but this: a devout understanding of life, according to which man regards his earthly existence as only a fragmentary manifestation of the complete life, connecting his own life with infinite life, and, recognising his highest welfare in the fulfillment of the laws of this infinite life, regards the fulfillment of these laws as more binding upon himself than the fulfillment of any human laws whatsoever.

Only such a religious conception, uniting all men in the same understanding of life, incompatible with subordination to power and participation in it, can truly destroy power.

Only such a life-conception will give men the possibility — without joining in violence — of combining into rational and just forms of life.

Strange to say, only after men have been brought by life itself to the conviction that existing power is invincible, and in our time cannot be overthrown by force, have they come to understand that ridiculously self-evident truth that power and all the evil produced by it are but results of bad life in men, and that therefore, for the abolition of power and the evil it produces, good life on the part of men is necessary.

Men are beginning to understand this. And now they have further to understand that there is only one means for a good life amongst men: the profession and realisation of a religious teaching natural and comprehensible to the majority of mankind.

Only by means of professing and realising such a religious

Digitized by Google

teaching can men attain the ideal which has now arisen in their consciousness, and towards which they are striving.

All other attempts at the abolition of power and at organising, without power, a good life amongst men are only a futile expenditure of effort, and do not bring near the aim towards which men are striving, but only remove them from it.

V

This is what I wish to say to you, sincere people, who, not satisfied with egotistic life, desire to give your strength to the service of your brothers. If you participate, or desire to participate, in governmental activity, and by this means to serve the people, then consider: What is every Government resting on power? And having put this question to yourself, you cannot but see that there is no Government which does not commit, does not prepare to commit, does not rest upon, violence, robbery, murder.

An American writer, little known — Thoreau,— in his essay on why it is men's duty to disobey the Government, relates how he refused to pay the Government of the United States a tax of one dollar, explaining his refusal on the grounds that he does not desire his dollar to participate in the activity of a Government which sanctions the slavery of the negroes. Can not, and should not, the same thing be felt in relation to his Government, I do not say by a Russian, but by a citizen of the most progressive State — the United States of America, with its action in Cuba and the Philippines, with its relation to negroes and the banishment of the Chinese; or of England, with its opium, and Boers; or of France, with its horrors of militarism?

Therefore, a sincere man, wishing to serve his fellow-men, if only he has seriously realised what every Government is, cannot participate in it otherwise than on the strength of the principle that the end justifies the means.

But such an activity has always been harmful for those in whose interests it was undertaken, as well as for those who had recourse to it.

The thing is very simple. You wish, by submitting to the

Digitized by Google

Government and making use of its laws, to snatch from it more liberty and rights for the people. But the liberty and the rights of the people are in inverse ratio to the power of the Government, and in general of the ruling classes. The more liberty and rights the people will have, the less power and advantage will the Government gain from them. Governments know this, and, having all the power in their hands, they readily allow all kinds of Liberal prattle, and even some insignificant Liberal reforms, which justify its power, but they immediately coercively arrest Liberal inclinations which threaten not only the advantages of the rulers but their very existence. So that all your efforts to serve the people through the power of governmental administration or through Parliaments will only lead to this — that you, by your activity, will increase the power of the ruling classes, and will, according to the degree of your sincerity, unconsciously or consciously participate in this power. So it is in regard to those who desire to serve the people by means of the existing State organisations.

If, on the other hand, you belong to the category of sincere people desiring to serve the nation by revolutionary, Socialistic activity, then (not to speak of the insufficiency of aim involved in that material welfare of men towards which you are striving, which never satisfied anyone) consider the means which you possess for its attainment. These means are, in the first place and above all, immoral, containing falsehood, deception, violence, murder; secondly, these means can in no case attain their end. The strength and caution of Governments defending their existence are in our time so great that not only can no ruse, deception, or harsh action overthrow them — they cannot even shake them. All revolutionary attempts only furnish new justification for the violence of Governments, and increase their power.

But even if we admit the impossible — that a revolution in our time could be crowned with success — then, in the first place, why should we expect that, contrary to all which has ever taken place, the power which has overturned another power can increase the liberty of men and become more beneficent than the one it has overthrown? Secondly, if

Digitized by Google

the conjecture, contrary to common sense and experience, were possible, that power having abolished power could give people the freedom necessary to establish those conditions of life which they regard as most advantageous for themselves, then there would be no reason whatever to suppose that people living an egotistical life could establish amongst themselves better conditions than the previous ones.

Let the Queen of the Dahomeys establish the most Liberal constitution, and let her even realise that nationalisation of the instruments of labor which, in the opinion of the Socialists, would save people from all their calamities — it would still be necessary for someone to have power in order that the constitution should work and the instruments of labor should not be seized into private hands. But as long as these people are Dahomeys, with their life-conception, it is evident that — although in another form — the violence of a certain portion of the Dahomeys over the others will be the same as without a constitution and without the nationalisation of the instruments of labor. Before realising the Socialistic organisation it would be necessary for the Dahomeys to lose their taste for bloody tyranny. Just the same is necessary for Europeans also.

In order that men may live a common life without oppressing each other, there is necessary, not an organisation supported by force, but a moral state in accordance with which people, from their inner convictions and not by coercion, should act towards others as they desire that others should act towards them. Such people do exist. They exist in religious Christian communities in America, in Russia, in Canada. Such people do indeed, without laws supported by force, live the communal life without oppressing each other.

Thus the rational activity proper to our time for men of our Christian society is only one: the profession and preaching by word and deed of the last and highest religious teaching known to us, of the Christian teaching; not of that Christian teaching which, whilst submitting to the existing order of life, demands of men only the fulfillment of external ritual, or is satisfied with faith in and the preaching of salvation through redemption, but of that vital Christianity the in-

Digitized by Google

evitable condition of which is, not only non-participation in the action of the Government, but disobedience to its demands, since these demands — from taxes and custom-houses to law courts and armies — are all opposed to this true Christianity. If this be so, then it is evident that it is not to the establishment of new forms that the activity of men desirous of serving their neighbor should be directed, but to the alteration and perfecting of their own characters and those of other people.

Those who act in the other way generally think that the forms of life and the character of life-conception of men may simultaneously improve. But thinking thus, they make the usual mistake of taking the result for the cause and the cause for the result or for an accompanying condition.

The alteration of the character and life-conception of men inevitably brings with it the alteration of those forms in which men had lived, whereas the alteration of the forms of life not only does not contribute to the alteration of the character and life-conception of men, but, more than anything else, obstructs this alteration by directing the attention and activity of men into a false channel. To alter the forms of life, hoping thereby to alter the character and life-conception of men, is like altering in various ways the position of wet wood in a stove, believing that there can be such a position of wet fuel as will cause it to catch fire. Only dry wood will take fire independently of the position in which it is placed.

This error is so obvious that people could not submit to it if there were not a reason which rendered them liable to it. This reason consists in this: that the alteration of the character of men must begin in themselves, and demands much struggle and labor; whereas the alteration of the forms of the life of others is attained easily without inner effort over oneself, and has the appearance of a very important and far-reaching activity.

It is against this error, the source of the greatest evil, that I warn you, men sincerely desirous of serving your neighbor by your lives.

Digitized by Google

VI

"But we cannot live quietly occupying ourselves with the profession and teaching of Christianity when we see around us suffering people. We wish to serve them actively. For this we are ready to surrender our labor, even our lives," say people with more or less sincere indignation.

How do you know, I would answer these people, that you are called to serve men precisely by that method which appears to you the most useful and practical? What you say only shows that you have already decided that we cannot serve mankind by a Christian life, and that true service lies only in political activity, which attracts you.

All politicians think likewise, and they are all in opposition to each other, and therefore certainly cannot all be right. It would be very well if everyone could serve men as he pleased, but such is not the case, and there exists only one means of serving men and improving their condition. This sole means consists in the profession and realisation of a teaching from which flows the inner work of perfecting oneself. The self-perfecting of a true Christian, always living naturally amongst men and *not* avoiding them, consists in the establishment of better and even more loving relations between himself and other men. The establishment of loving relations between men cannot but improve their general conditions, although the form of this improvement remains unknown to man.

It is true that in serving through governmental activity, parliamentary or revolutionary, we can determine beforehand the results we wish to attain, and at the same time profit by all the advantages of a pleasant, luxurious life, and obtain a brilliant position, the approval of men, and great fame. If those who participate in such activity have indeed sometimes to suffer, it is such a possibility of suffering as in every strife is redeemed by the possibility of success. In the military activity, suffering and even death are still more possible, and yet only the least moral and the egotistic choose it.

On the other hand, the religious activity, in the first place, does not show us the results which it attains; and secondly,

Digitized by Google

this activity demands the renunciation of external success, and not only does not afford a brilliant position and fame, but brings men to the lowest position from the social point of view — subjects them not only to contempt and condemnation, but to the most cruel sufferings and death.

Thus, in our time of universal conscription, religious activity compels every man who is called to the service of murder to bear all those punishments with which the Government punishes for refusal of military service. Therefore, religious activity is difficult, but it alone gives man the consciousness of true freedom, and the assurance that he is doing that which he should do.

Consequently, this activity alone is truly fruitful, attaining not only its highest object, but also, incidentally and in the most natural and simple way, those results towards which social reformers strive in such artificial ways.

Thus there is only one means of serving men, which consists in oneself living a good life. And not only is this means not visionary — as it is regarded by those to whom it is not advantageous,— but all other means are visionary, by which the leaders of the masses allure them into a false way, distracting them from that method which alone is true.

VII

"But if this be so, when will it come to pass?" say those who wish to see the realisation of this ideal as quickly as possible.

It would, of course, be much better if one could do this very quickly, immediately.

It would be very well if one could quickly, immediately, grow a forest. But one cannot do this; one must wait till the seeds shoot, then the leaves, then the branches, and then the trees will grow up.

One can stick branches into the ground, and for a short time they will resemble a wood, but it will be only a resemblance. The same with a rapid establishment of good social order amongst men. One can arrange a resemblance of good order, as do the Governments, but these imitations

Digitized by Google

only remove the possibility of true order. They remove it, firstly, by cheating men, showing them the image of good order where it does not exist; and, secondly, because these imitations of order are attained only by power, and power depraves men, rulers as well as ruled, and therefore makes true order less possible.

Therefore, attempts at a rapid realisation of the ideal not only do not contribute to its actual realisation, but more than anything impede it.

So that the solution of the question whether the ideal of mankind — a well-organised society without violence — will be organised soon, or not soon, depends upon whether the rulers of the masses who sincerely wish the people good will soon understand that nothing removes men so much from the realisation of their ideal as that which they are now doing — namely, continuing to maintain old superstitions, or denying all religions, and directing the people's activity to the service of the Government, of revolution, of Socialism. If those men who sincerely wish to serve their neighbor were only to understand all the fruitlessness of those means of organising the welfare of men proposed by the supporters of the State, and by revolutionists — if only they were to understand that the one means by which men can be liberated from their sufferings consists in men themselves ceasing to live an egotistic heathen life, and beginning to live a universal Christian one, not recognising, as they do now, the possibility and the legality of using violence over one's neighbors, and participating in it for one's personal aims; but if, on the contrary, they were to follow in life the fundamental and highest law of acting towards others as one wishes others to act towards oneself — then very quickly would be overthrown those irrational and cruel forms of life in which we now live, and new ones would develop corresponding to the new consciousness of men.

Think only what enormous and splendid mental powers are now spent in the service of the State — which has outgrown its time — and in its defence from revolution; how much youthful and enthusiastic effort is spent on attempts at revolution, on an impossible struggle with the State; how much

Digitized by Google

is spent on unrealisable Socialistic dreamings. All this is not only delaying but rendering impossible the realisation of the welfare towards which all men are striving. How would it be if all those who are spending their powers so fruitlessly, and often with harm to their neighbors, were to direct them all to that which alone affords the possibility of good social life — to their inner self-perfection?

How many times would one be able to build a new house, out of new solid material, if all those efforts which have been and are now being spent on propping up the old house were used resolutely and conscientiously for the preparation of the material for a new house and the building thereof, which, although obviously it could not at first be as luxurious and convenient for some chosen ones as was the old one, would undoubtedly be more stable, and would afford the complete possibility for those improvements which are necessary, not for the chosen only, but also for all men.

So that all I have here said amounts to the simple, generally comprehensible, and irrefutable truth: that in order that good life should exist amongst men it is necessary that men should be good.

There is only one way of influencing men towards a good life: namely, to live a good life oneself. Therefore the activity of those who desire to contribute to the establishment of good life amongst men can and should only consist in efforts towards inner perfection — in the fulfilment of that which is expressed in the Gospel by the words: "Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven."

Digitized by Google

OSCAR WILDE

(1856–1900)

THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER SOCIALISM[1]

Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But, for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first. At present, in consequence of the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that is really congenial to them, and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture — in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation. Upon the other hand, there are a great many people who, having no private property of their own, and being always on the brink of sheer starvation, are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden, to do work that is quite uncongenial to them, and to which they are forced by the

[1] First published in 1891. A few pages at the beginning, and a rather lengthy section toward the middle of the essay describing the baleful effects of the British public's attempt to exercise authority over art and artists, have been omitted here.

Digitized by Google

peremptory, unreasonable, degrading Tyranny of want. These are the poor; and amongst them there is no grace of manner, or charm of speech, or civilisation, or culture, or refinement in pleasures, or joy of life. From their collective force Humanity gains much in material prosperity. But it is only the material result that it gains, and the man who is poor is in himself absolutely of no importance. He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient.

Of course, it might be said that the Individualism generated under conditions of private property is not always, or even as a rule, of a fine or wonderful type, and that the poor, if they have not culture and charm, have still many virtues. Both these statements would be quite true. The possession of private property is very often extremely demoralising, and that is, of course, one of the reasons why Socialism wants to get rid of the institution. In fact, property is really a nuisance. Some years ago people went about the country saying that property has duties. They said it so often and so tediously that, at last, the Church has begun to say it. One hears it now from every pulpit. It is perfectly true. Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore. It involves endless claims upon one, endless attention to business, endless bother. If property had simply pleasures, we could stand it; but its duties make it unbearable. In the interest of the rich we must get rid of it. The virtues of the poor may be readily admitted, and are much to be regretted. We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, but the best amongst the poor are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to

Digitized by Google

know it. As for being discontened, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. Sometimes the poor are praised for being thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less. For a town or country laborer to practise thrift would be absolutely immoral. Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly-fed animal. He should decline to live like that, and should either steal or go on the rates, which is considered by many to be a form of stealing. As for begging, it is safer to beg than to take, but it is finer to take than to beg. No: a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious, is probably a real personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the virtuous poor, one can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy, and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid. I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he himself is able under those conditions to realize some form of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance.

However, the explanation is not really difficult to find. It is simply this. Misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralysing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and they often entirely disbelieve them. What is said by great employers of labor against agitators is unquestionably true. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary.

Digitized by Google

Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilisation. Slavery was put down in America, not in consequence of any action on the part of the slaves, or even any express desire on their part that they should be free. It was put down entirely through the grossly illegal conduct of certain agitators in Boston and elsewhere, who were not slaves themselves, nor owners of slaves, nor had anything to do with the question really. It was, undoubtedly, the Abolitionists who set the torch alight, who began the whole thing. And it is curious to note that from the slaves themselves they received, not merely very little assistance, but hardly any sympathy even; and when at the close of the war the slaves found themselves free, found themselves indeed so absolutely free that they were free to starve, many of them bitterly regretted the new state of things. To the thinker, the most tragic fact in the whole of the French Revolution is not that Marie Antoinette was killed for being a queen, but that the starved peasant of the Vendée voluntarily went out to die for the hideous cause of feudalism.

It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and happiness, under an industrial-barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all. It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish. Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be good for him, will not be good in itself, and will not be good for others. And by work I simply mean activity of any kind.

I hardly think that any Socialist, nowadays, would seriously propose that an inspector should call every morning at each house to see that each citizen rose up and did manual labor for eight hours. Humanity has got beyond that stage, and reserves such a form of life for the people whom, in a very arbitrary manner, it chooses to call criminals. But I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come

Digitized by Google

across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion. Of course, authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. It is only in voluntary associations that men are fine.

But it may be asked how Individualism, which is now more or less dependent on the existence of private property for its development, will benefit by the abolition of such private property. The answer is very simple. It is true that, under existing conditions, a few men who have had private means of their own, such as Byron, Shelley, Browning, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and others, have been able to realise their personality more or less completely. Not one of these men ever did a single day's work for hire. They were relieved from poverty. They had an immense advantage. The question is whether it would be for the good of Individualism that such an advantage should be taken away. Let us suppose that it is taken away. What happens then to Individualism? How will it benefit?

It will benefit in this way. Under the new conditions Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great imaginatively-realised Individualism of such poets as I have mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally. For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain, not growth, its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is. Private property has crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving them. It has debarred the other part of the community from being individual by putting them on the wrong road, and encumbering them. Indeed, so completely has man's personality been absorbed by his possessions that the English law has always treated offences against a man's property with far more sever-

Digitized by Google

ity than offences against his person, and property is still the test of complete citizenship. The industry necessary for the making of money is also very demoralising. In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honor, respect, titles, and other pleasant things of the kind, man, being naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property, and goes on wearily and tediously accumulating it long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or enjoy, or perhaps even know of. Man will kill himself by overwork in order to secure property, and really, considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One's regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him — in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living. He is also, under existing conditions, very insecure. An enormously wealthy merchant may be — often is — at every moment of his life at the mercy of things that are not under his control. If the wind blows an extra point or so, or the weather suddenly changes, or some trivial thing happens, his ship may go down, his speculations may go wrong, and he finds himself a poor man, with his social position quite gone. Now, nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has, is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance.

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.

It is a question whether we have ever seen the full expression of a personality, except on the imaginative plane of art. In action, we never have. Cæsar, says Mommsen, was the complete and perfect man. But how tragically insecure was Cæsar! Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority. Cæsar was very perfect, but his perfection travelled by too dangerous a road.

Digitized by Google

Marcus Aurelius was the perfect man, says Renan. Yes; the great emperor was a perfect man. But how intolerable were the endless claims upon him! He staggered under the burden of the empire. He was conscious how inadequate one man was to bear the weight of that Titan and too vast orb. What I mean by a perfect man is one who develops under perfect conditions; one who is not wounded, or worried, or maimed, or in danger. Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction. Byron's personality, for instance, was terribly wasted in its battle with the stupidity and hypocrisy and Philistinism of the English. Such battles do not always intensify strength; they often exaggerate weakness. Byron was never able to give us what he might have given us. Shelley escaped better. Like Byron, he got out of England as soon as possible. But he was not so well known. If the English had realised what a great poet he really was, they would have fallen on him with tooth and nail, and made his life as unbearable to him as they possibly could. But he was not a remarkable figure in society, and consequently he escaped, to a certain degree. Still, even in Shelley the note of rebellion is sometimes too strong. The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace.

It will be a marvellous thing — the true personality of man — when we see it. It will grow naturally and simply, flower-like, or as a tree grows. It will not be at discord. It will never argue or dispute. It will not prove things. It will know everything. And yet it will not busy itself about knowledge. It will have wisdom. Its value will not be measured by material things. It will have nothing. And yet it will have everything, and whatever one takes from it, it will still have, so rich will it be. It will not be always meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. And yet while it will not meddle with others, it will help all, as a beautiful thing helps us, by being what it is. The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child.

In its development it will be assisted by Christianity, if

Digitized by Google

men desire that; but if men do not desire that, it will develop none the less surely. For it will not worry itself about the past, nor care whether things happened or did not happen. Nor will it admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority. Yet it will love those who sought to intensify it, and speak often of them. And of these Christ was one.

"Know thyself" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be thyself" shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply "Be thyself.' That is the secret of Christ.

When Jesus talks about the poor he simply means personalities, just as when he talks about the rich he simply means people who have not developed their personalities. Jesus moved in a community that allowed the accumulation of private property just as ours does, and the gospel that he preached was, not that in such a community it is an advantage for a man to live on scanty, unwholesome food, to wear ragged, unwholesome clothes, to sleep in horrid, unwholesome dwellings, and a disadvantage for a man to live under healthy, pleasant, and decent conditions. Such a view would have been wrong there and then, and would, of course, be still more wrong now and in England; for as man moves northward the material necessities of life become of more vital importance, and our society is infinitely more complex, and displays far greater extremes of luxury and pauperism than any society of the antique world. What Jesus meant, was this. He said to man, "You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be yourself. Don't imagine that your perfection lies in accumulating or possessing external things. Your perfection is inside of you. If only you could realise that, you would not want to be rich. Ordinary riches can be stolen from a man. Real riches cannot. In the treasury-house of your soul, there are infinitely precious things, that may not be taken from you. And so, try to so shape your life that external things will not harm you. And try also to get rid of personal property. It involves sordid preoccupation, endless industry, continual wrong. Personal property hinders Individualism at every step." It is to be noted that Jesus never says that

Digitized by Google

impoverished people are necessarily good, or wealthy people necessarily bad. That would not have been true. Wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people, more moral, more intellectual, more well-behaved. There is only one class in the community that thinks more about money than the rich, and that is the poor. The poor can think of nothing else. That is the misery of being poor. What Jesus does say, is that man reaches his perfection, not through what he has, not even through what he does, but entirely through what he is. And so the wealthy young man who comes to Jesus is represented as a thoroughly good citizen, who has broken none of the laws of his state, none of the commandments of his religion. He is quite respectable, in the ordinary sense of that extraordinary word. Jesus says to him, "You should give up private property. It hinders you from realising your perfection. It is a drag upon you. It is a burden. Your personality does not need it. It is within you, and not outside of you, that you will find what you really are, and what you really want." To his own friends he says the same thing. He tells them to be themselves, and not to be always worrying about other things. What do other things matter? Man is complete in himself. When they go into the world, the world will disagree with them. That is inevitable. The world hates Individualism. But that is not to trouble them. They are to be calm and self-centred. If a man takes their cloak, they are to give him their coat, just to show that material things are of no importance. If people abuse them, they are not to answer back. What does it signify? The things people say of a man do not alter a man. He is what he is. Public opinion is of no value whatsoever. Even if people employ actual violence, they are not to be violent in turn. That would be to fall to the same low level. After all, even in prison, a man can be quite free. His soul can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace. And, above all things, they are not to interfere with other people or judge them in any way. Personality is a very mysterious thing. A man cannot always be estimated by what he does. He may keep the law and yet be worthless. He may break the

Digitized by Google

law, and yet be fine. He may be bad, without ever doing anything bad. He may commit a sin against society, and yet realise through that sin his true perfection.

There was a woman who was taken in adultery. We are not told the history of her love, but that love must have been very great; for Jesus said that her sins were forgiven her, not because she repented, but because her love was so intense and wonderful. Later on, a short time before his death, as he sat at a feast, the woman came in and poured costly perfumes on his hair. His friends tried to interfere with her, and said that it was extravagance, and that the money that the perfume cost should have been expended on charitable relief of people in want, or something of that kind. Jesus did not accept that view. He pointed out that the material needs of Man were great and very permanent, but that the spiritual needs of Man were greater still, and that in one divine moment, and by selecting its own mode of expression, a personality might make itself perfect. The world worships the woman, even now, as a saint.

Yes; there are suggestive things in Individualism. Socialism annihilates family life, for instance. With the abolition of private property, marriage in its present form must disappear. This is part of the programme. Individualism accepts this and makes it fine. It converts the abolition of legal restraint into a form of freedom that will help the full development of personality, and make the love of man and woman more wonderful, more beautiful, and more ennobling. Jesus knew this. He rejected the claims of family life, although they existed in his day and community in a very marked form. "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" he said, when he was told that they wished to speak to him. When one of his followers asked leave to go and bury his father, "Let the dead bury the dead," was his terrible answer. He would allow no claim whatsoever to be made on personality.

And so he who would lead a Christlike life is he who is perfectly and absolutely himself. He may be a great poet, or a great man of science; or a young student at a University, or one who watches sheep upon a moor; or a maker

Digitized by Google

of dramas, like Shakespeare, or a thinker about God, like Spinoza; or a child who plays in a garden, or a fisherman who throws his net into the sea. It does not matter what he is, as long as he realises the perfection of the soul that is within him. All imitation in morals and in life is wrong. Through the streets of Jerusalem at the present day crawls one who is mad and carries a wooden cross on his shoulders. He is a symbol of the lives that are marred by imitation. Father Damien was Christlike when he went out to live with the lepers, because in such service he realised fully what was best in him. But he was not more Christlike than Wagner when he realised his soul in music; or than Shelley, when he realised his soul in song. There is no one type for man. There are as many perfections as there are imperfect men. And while to the claims of charity a man may yield and yet be free, to the claims of conformity no man may yield and remain free at all.

Individualism, then, is what through Socialism we are to attain. As a natural result the State must give up all idea of government. It must give it up because, as a wise man once said many centuries before Christ, there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there is no such thing as governing mankind. All modes of government are failures. Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things. Oligarchies are unjust to the many, and ochlocracies are unjust to the few. High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people. It has been found out. I must say that it was high time, for all authority is quite degrading. It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised. When it is violently, grossly, and cruelly used, it produces a good effect, by creating, or at any rate bringing out, the spirit of revolt and Individualism that is to kill it. When it is used with a certain amount of kindness, and accompanied by prizes and rewards, it is dreadfully demoralising. People, in that case, are less conscious of the horrible pressure that is being put on them, and so go through their lives in a sort of coarse comfort, like petted animals, with-

Digitized by Google

out ever realising that they are probably thinking other people's thoughts, living by other people's standards, wearing practically what one may call other people's second-hand clothes, and never being themselves for a single moment. "He who would be free," says a fine thinker, "must not conform." And authority, by bribing people to conform, produces a very gross kind of over-fed barbarism amongst us.

With authority, punishment will pass away. This will be a great gain — a gain, in fact, of incalculable value. As one reads history, not in the expurgated editions written for schoolboys and passmen, but in the original authorities of each time, one is absolutely sickened, not by crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted; and a community is infinitely more brutalised by the habitual employment of punishment, than it is by the occurrence of crime. It obviously follows that the more punishment is inflicted the more crime is produced, and most modern legislation has clearly recognised this, and has made it its task to diminish punishment as far as it thinks it can. Wherever it has really diminished it, the results have always been extremely good. The less punishment, the less crime. When there is no punishment at all, crime will either cease to exist, or, if it occurs, will be treated by physicians as a very distressing form of dementia, to be cured by care and kindness. For what are called criminals nowadays are not criminals at all. Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime. That indeed is the reason why our criminals are, as a class, so absolutely uninteresting from any psychological point of view. They are not marvellous Macbeths and terrible Vautrins. They are merely what ordinary, respectable commonplace people would be if they had not got enough to eat. When private property is abolished there will be no necessity for crime, no demand for it; it will cease to exist. Of course, all crimes are not crimes against property, though such are the crimes that the English law, valuing what a man has more than what a man is, punishes with the harshest and most horrible severity (if we except the crime of murder, and regard death as worse than penal servitude, a point on which our criminals, I believe, disagree).

Digitized by Google

But though a crime may not be against property, it may spring from the misery and rage and depression produced by our wrong system of property-holding, and so, when that system is abolished, will disappear. When each member of the community has sufficient for his wants, and is not interfered with by his neighbor, it will not be an object of any interest to him to interfere with anyone else. Jealousy, which is an extraordinary source of crime in modern life, is an emotion closely bound up with our conceptions of property, and under Socialism and Individualism will die out. It is remarkable that in communistic tribes jealousy is entirely unknown.

Now as the State is not to govern, it may be asked what the State is to do. The State is to be a voluntary association that will organize labor, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities. The State is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful. And as I have mentioned the word labor, I cannot help saying that a great deal of nonsense is being written and talked nowadays about the dignity of manual labor. There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labor at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure, and many forms of labor are quite pleasureless activities, and should be regarded as such. To sweep a slushy crossing for eight hours on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by a machine.

And I have no doubt that it will be so. Up to the present, man has been, to a certain extent, the slave of machinery, and there is something tragic in the fact that as soon as man had invented a machine to do his work he began to starve. This, however, is, of course, the result of our property system and our system of competition. One man owns a machine which does the work of five hundred men. Five hundred men are, in consequence, thrown out of employment, and, having

Digitized by Google

no work to do, become hungry and take to thieving. The one man secures the produce of the machine and keeps it, and has five hundred times as much as he should have, and probably, which is of much more importance, a great deal more than he really wants. Were that machine the property of all, everybody would benefit by it. It would be an immense advantage to the community. All unintellectual labor, all monotonous, dull labor, all labor that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man. There is no doubt at all that this is the future of machinery; and just as trees grow while the country gentleman is asleep, so while Humanity will be amusing itself, or enjoying cultivated leisure — which, and not labor, is the aim of man — or making beautiful things, or reading beautiful things, or simply contemplating the world with admiration and delight, machinery will be doing all the necessary and unpleasant work. The fact is, that civilisation requires slaves. The Greeks were quite right there. Unless there are slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends. And when scientific men are no longer called upon to go down to a depressing East End and distribute bad cocoa and worse blankets to starving people, they will have delightful leisure in which to devise wonderful and marvellous things for their own joy and the joy of every one else. There will be great storages of force for every city, and for every house if required, and this force man will convert into heat, light, or motion, according to his needs. Is this Utopian? A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better

Digitized by Google

country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

Now, I have said that the community by means of organisation of machinery will supply the useful things, and that the beautiful things will be made by the individual. This is not merely necessary, but it is the only possible way by which we can get either the one or the other. An individual who has to make things for the use of others, and with reference to their wants and their wishes, does not work with interest, and consequently cannot put into his work what is best in him. Upon the other hand, whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft. A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist. Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of Individualism that the world has known. Crime, which, under certain conditions, may seem to have created Individualism, must take cognisance of other people and interfere with them. It belongs to the sphere of action. But alone, without any reference to his neighbors, without any interference, the artist can fashion a beautiful thing; and if he does not do it solely for his own pleaure, he is not an artist at all.

And it is to be noted that it is the fact that Art is this intense form of Individualism that makes the public try to exercise over it an authority that is as immoral as it is ridiculous, and as corrupting as it is contemptible. It is not quite their fault. The public has always, and in every age, been badly brought up. They are continually asking Art to be popular, to please their want of taste, to flatter their absurd vanity, to tell them what they have been told before,

Digitized by Google

to show them what they ought to be tired of seeing, to amuse them when they feel heavy after eating too much, and to distract their thoughts when they are wearied of their own stupidity. Now Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic. There is a very wide difference. If a man of science were told that the results of his experiments, and the conclusions that he arrived at, should be of such a character that they would not upset the received popular notions on the subject, or disturb popular prejudice, or hurt the sensibilities of people who knew nothing about science; if a philosopher were told that he had a perfect right to speculate in the highest spheres of thought, provided that he arrived at the same conclusions as were held by those who had never thought in any sphere at all — well, nowadays the man of science and the philosopher would be considerably amused. Yet it is really a very few years since both philosophy and science were subjected to brutal popular control, to authority in fact — the authority of either the general ignorance of the community, or the terror and greed for power of an ecclesiastical or governmental class. Of course, we have to a very great extent got rid of any attempt on the part of the community, or the Church, or the Government, to interfere with the individualism of speculative thought, but the attempt to interfere with the individualism of imaginative art still lingers. In fact, it does more than linger; it is aggressive, offensive, and brutalising.

. . . . . .

People sometimes inquire what form of government is most suitable for an artist to live under. To this question there is only one answer. The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all. Authority over him and his art is ridiculous. It has been stated that under despotisms artists have produced lovely work. This is not quite so. Artists have visited despots, not as subjects to be tyrannised over, but as wandering wonder-makers, as fascinating vagrant personalities, to be entertained and charmed and suffered to be at peace, and allowed to create. There is this to be said in favor of the despot, that he, being an individual,

Digitized by Google

may have culture, while the mob, being a monster, has none. One who is an Emperor and King may stoop down to pick up a brush for a painter, but when the democracy stoops down it is merely to throw mud. And yet the democracy have not so far to stoop as the emperor. In fact, when they want to throw mud they have not to stoop at all. But there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad.

There are three kinds of despots. There is the despot who tyrannises over the body. There is the despot who tyrannises over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannises over the soul and body alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People. The Prince may be cultivated. Many Princes have been. Yet in the Prince there is danger. One thinks of Dante at the bitter feast in Verona, of Tasso in Ferrara's madman's cell. It is better for the artist not to live with Princes. The Pope may be cultivated. Many Popes have been; the bad Popes have been. The bad Popes loved Beauty, almost as passionately, nay, with as much passion as the good Popes hated Thought. To the wickedness of the Papacy humanity owes much. The goodness of the Papacy owes a terrible debt to humanity. Yet, though the Vatican has kept the rhetoric of its thunders, and lost the rod of its lightning, it is better for the artist not to live with Popes. It was a Pope who said of Cellini to a conclave of Cardinals that common laws and common authority were not made for men such as he; but it was a Pope who thrust Cellini into prison, and kept him there till he sickened with rage, and created unreal visions for himself, and saw the gilded sun enter his room, and grew so enamoured of it that he sought to escape, and crept out from tower to tower, and falling through dizzy air at dawn, maimed himself, and was by a vine-dresser covered with vine leaves, and carried in a cart to one who, loving beautiful things, had care of him. There is danger in Popes. And as for the People, what of them and their authority? Perhaps of them and their authority one has spoken enough. Their authority is a thing blind, deaf, hideous, grotesque, tragic, amusing, serious, and obscene.

Digitized by Google

It is impossible for the artist to live with the People. All despots bribe. The People bribe and brutalise. Who told them to exercise authority? They were made to live, to listen, and to love. Someone has done them a great wrong. They have marred themselves by imitation of their inferiors. They have taken the sceptre of the Prince. How should they use it? They have taken the triple tiara of the Pope. How should they carry its burden? They are as a clown whose heart is broken. They are as a priest whose soul is not yet born. Let all who love Beauty pity them. Though they themselves love not Beauty, yet let them pity themselves. Who taught them the trick of tyranny?

There are many other things that one might point out. One might point out how the Renaissance was great, because it sought to solve no social problem, and busied itself not about such things, but suffered the individual to develop freely, beautifully, and naturally, and so had great and individual artists, and great and individual men. One might point out how Louis XIV., by creating the modern State, destroyed the individualism of the artist, and made things monstrous in their monotony of repetition, and contemptible in their conformity to rule, and destroyed throughout all France all those fine freedoms of expression that had made tradition new in beauty, and new modes one with antique form. But the past is of no importance. The present is of no importance. It is with the future that we have to deal. For the past is what man should not have been. The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are.

It will, of course, be said that such a scheme as is set forth here is quite unpractical, and goes against human nature. This is perfectly true. It is unpractical, and it goes against human nature. This is why it is worth carrying out, and that is why one proposes it. For what is a practical scheme? A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under existing conditions. But it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The conditions will be done away

Digitized by Google

with, and human nature will change. The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality we can predicate of it. The systems that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and not on its growth and development. The error of Louis XIV. was that he thought human nature would always be the same. The result of his error was the French Revolution. It was an admirable result. All the results of the mistakes of governments are quite admirable.

It is to be noted that Individualism does not come to the man with any sickly cant about duty, which merely means doing what other people want because they want it; or any hideous cant about self-sacrifice, which is merely a survival of savage mutilation. In fact, it does not come to a man with any claims upon him at all. It comes naturally and inevitably out of man. It is the point to which all development tends. It is the differentiation to which all organisms grow. It is the perfection that is inherent in every mode of life, and towards which every mode of life quickens. And so Individualism exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him. It does not try to force people to be good. It knows that people are good when they are let alone. Man will develop Individualism out of himself. Man is now so developing Individualism. To ask whether Individualism is practical is like asking whether Evolution is practical. Evolution is the law of life, and there is no evolution except towards Individualism. Where this tendency is not expressed, it is a case of artificially-arrested growth, or of disease, or of death.

Individualism will also be unselfish and unaffected. It has been pointed out that one of the results of the extraordinary tyranny of authority is that words are absolutely distorted from their proper and simple meaning, and are used to express the obverse of their right signification. What is true about Art is true about Life. A man is called affected, nowadays, if he dresses as he likes to dress. But in doing that he is acting in a perfectly natural manner. Affectation, in such matters, consist in dressing according to the views of one's

Digitized by Google

neighbor, whose views, as they are the views of the majority, will probably be extremely stupid. Or a man is called selfish if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality; if, in fact, the primary aim of his life is self-development. But this is the way in which everyone should live. Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. And unselfishness is letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them. Selfishness always aims at creating around it an absolute uniformity of type. Unselfishness recognises infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, accepts it, acquiesces in it, enjoys it. It is not selfish to think for oneself. A man who does not think for himself does not think at all. It is grossly selfish to require of one's neighbor that he should think in the same way, and hold the same opinions. Why should he? If he can think, he will probably think differently. If he cannot think, it is monstrous to require thought of any kind from him. A red rose is not selfish because it wants to be a red rose. It would be horribly selfish if it wanted all the other flowers in the garden to be both red and roses. Under Individualism people will be quite natural and absolutely unselfish, and will know the meanings of the words, and realise them in their free, beautiful lives. Nor will men be egotistic as they are now. For the egotist is he who makes claims upon others, and the Individualist will not desire to do that. It will not give him pleasure. When man has realised Individualism, he will also realise sympathy and exercise it freely and spontaneously. Up to the present man has hardly cultivated sympathy at all. He has merely sympathy with pain, and sympathy with pain is not the highest form of sympathy. All sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety. We become afraid that we ourselves might be as the leper or as the blind, and that no man would have care of us. It is curiously limiting, too. One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life's sores and maladies merely, but with life's joy and beauty

Digitized by Google

and energy and health and freedom. The wider sympathy is, of course, the more difficult. It requires more unselfishness. Anybody can sympathise with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature — it requires, in fact, the nature of a true Individualist — to sympathise with a friend's success.

In the modern stress of competition and struggle for place, such sympathy is naturally rare, and is also very much stifled by the immoral ideal of uniformity of type and conformity to rule which is so prevalent everywhere, and is perhaps most obnoxious in England.

Sympathy with pain there will, of course, always be. It is one of the first instincts of man. The animals which are individual, the higher animals, that is to say, share it with us. But it must be remembered that while sympathy with joy intensifies the sum of joy in the world, sympathy with pain does not really diminish the amount of pain. It may make man better able to endure evil, but the evil remains. Sympathy with consumption does not cure consumption; that is what Science does. And when Socialism has solved the problem of poverty, and Science solved the problem of disease, the area of the sentimentalists will be lessened, and the sympathy of man will be large, healthy, and spontaneous. Man will have joy in the contemplation of the joyous life of others.

For it is through joy that the Individualism of the future will develop itself. Christ made no attempt to reconstruct society, and consequently the Individualism that he preached to man could be realised only through pain or in solitude. The ideals that we owe to Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely, or of the man who resists society absolutely. But man is naturally social. Even the Thebaid became peopled at last. And though the cenobite realises his personality, it is often an impoverished personality that he so realises. Upon the other hand, the terrible truth that pain is a mode through which man may realise himself exercises a wonderful fascination over the world. Shallow speakers and shallow thinkers in pulpits and on platforms often talk about the world's worship of pleasure, and whine against it. But it is rarely in the world's history that its

Digitized by Google

ideal has been one of joy and beauty. The worship of pain has far more often dominated the world. Mediævalism, with its saints and martyrs, its love of self-torture, its wild passion for wounding itself, its gashing with knives, and its whipping with rods — Mediævalism is real Christianity, and the mediæval Christ is the real Christ. When the Renaissance dawned upon the world, and brought with it the new ideals of the beauty of life and the joy of living, men could not understand Christ. Even Art shows us that. The painters of the Renaissance drew Christ as a little boy playing with another boy in a palace or a garden, or lying back in his mother's arms, smiling at her, or at a flower, or at a bright bird; or as a noble, stately figure moving nobly through the world; or as a wonderful figure rising in a sort of ecstasy from death to life. Even when they drew him crucified they drew him as a beautiful God on whom evil men had inflicted suffering. But he did not preoccupy them much. What delighted them was to paint the men and the women whom they admired, and to show the loveliness of this lovely earth. They painted many religious pictures — in fact, they painted far too many, and the monotony of type and motive is wearisome, and was bad for art. It was the result of the authority of the public in art-matters, and is to be deplored. But their soul was not in the subject. Raphael was a great artist when he painted his portrait of the Pope. When he painted his Madonnas and infant Christs, he is not a great artist at all. Christ had no message for the Renaissance, which was wonderful because it brought an ideal at variance with his, and to find the presentation of the real Christ we must go to mediæval art. There he is one maimed and marred; one who is not comely to look on, because Beauty is a joy; one who is not in fair raiment, because that may be a joy also; he is a beggar who has a marvellous soul; he is a leper whose soul is divine; he needs neither property nor health; he is a God realising his perfection through pain.

The evolution of man is slow. The injustice of men is great. It was necessary that pain should be put forward as a mode of self-realisation. Even now, in some places in the world, the message of Christ is necessary. No one who lived

Digitized by Google

in modern Russia could possibly realise his perfection except by pain. A few Russian artists have realised themselves in Art; in a fiction that is mediæval in character, because its dominant note is the realisation of men through suffering. But for those who are not artists, and to whom there is no mode of life but the actual life of fact, pain is the only door to perfection. A Russian who lives happily under the present system of government in Russia must either believe that man has no soul, or that, if he has, it is not worth developing. A Nihilist who rejects all authority, because he knows authority to be evil, and welcomes all pain, because through that he realises his personality, is a real Christian. To him the Christian ideal is a true thing.

And yet, Christ did not revolt against authority. He accepted the imperial authority of the Roman Empire and paid tribute. He endured the ecclesiastical authority of the Jewish Church, and would not repel its violence by any violence of his own. He had, as I said before, no scheme for the reconstruction of society. But the modern world has schemes. It proposes to do away with poverty and the suffering that it entails. It desires to get rid of pain, and the suffering that pain entails. It trusts to Socialism and to Science as its methods. What it aims at is an Individualism expressing itself through joy. This Individualism will be larger, fuller, lovelier than any Individualism has ever been. Pain is not the ultimate mode of perfection. It is merely provisional and a protest. It has reference to wrong, unhealthy, unjust surroundings. When the wrong, and the disease, and the injustice are removed, it will have no further place. It was a great work, but it is almost over. Its sphere lessens every day.

Nor will man miss it. For what man has sought for is, indeed, neither pain nor pleasure, but simply Life. Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly. When he can do so without exercising restraint on others, or suffering it ever, and his activities are all pleasurable to him, he will be saner, healthier, more civilised, more himself. Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment. The new

Digitized by Google

Individualism, for whose service Socialism, whether it wills it or not, is working, will be perfect harmony. It will be what the Greeks sought for, but could not, except in Thought, realise completely, because they had slaves, and fed them; it will be what the Renaissance sought for, but could not realise completely except in Art, because they had slaves, and starved them. It will be complete, and through it each man will attain to his perfection. The new Individualism is the new Hellenism.

THE END

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

NEW BOOKS

By ARTHUR RANSOME: *Russia in 1919* ($1.50).

The most intelligent and informative book on Russia that has thus far been written. The author is an expert on Russia and is one of England's best writers and most faithful reporters. The actual operations under the Soviet Republic—agriculture, industry, education, transportation and social life—are interestingly set down, and there are interviews with Lenin and all the leaders, including the heads of all the important departments of the government. The announcement of this book evoked such a response as to make necessary a second printing before publication.

By LAJPAT RAI: *The Political Future of India* ($1.50).

What do *you* know of the aspirations of 315,000,000 Indians? This is a full study of the present political situation in India, based on the Montagu-Chelmsford report of which too little is known here. Such important subjects as the public service in India, the European communities there, the Indian army and navy, tariffs, recommendations for repressive legislation, education, etc., are discussed in detail. The book as a whole tends to clarify the struggle between India and Great Britain, and to explain India's reaching for democracy and the political, social and economic facts from which it derives.

By NORMAN ANGELL: *The British Revolution and the American Democracy* ($1.50).

We have had popular *war* books; this is the authoritative *after-war* book. Few Americans are prepared for an intelligent discussion of the vital problems that clamor for solution. The prevailing unrest cannot be interpreted without an understanding of its universal significance. It is necessary for us to get the facts about the rise of British labor whose social programme has arrested the world's attention; about railways and other public utilities whose future control is in dispute; about conscription as a permanent policy; about the institution of private property as affected by the war; about the different definitions of democracy. Such information and much more, essential to the manifold study of reconstruction, is presented lucidly in this handbook to the new social and industrial order.

By G. D. H. COLE: *Labour in the Commonwealth* ($1.50).

This is virtually a restatement of those fundamental aims to which the more articulate section of British labor is endeavoring to give expression. It crystallizes the wide-spread dissatisfaction fermenting in the minds of workers. "The commodity theory of Labour," says the author, "is fundamentally inconsistent with the recognition of the fact that 'Labour' consists of human beings." He denies the sovereignty of the state but regards it as only one among various forms of association. The book reveals the difference between the commonwealth that is and the one that might be. Mr. Cole is a leading writer in the Guild Socialist movement and this book, in the *Manchester Guardian's* opinion, is his best since "The World of Labour."

PUBLISHED BY B. W. HUEBSCH

Digitized by Google

NEW BOOKS

By RANDOLPH BOURNE: *Untimely Papers* ($1.50).

Here are gathered together the notable political essays by this leader among the younger publicists of his day, and a fragment from an unfinished work on the State. A fresh scrutiny of this profound, brilliantly presented material confirms the widely held opinion that our country lost one of its most significant thinkers by his death. The volume includes the famous "The War and the Intellectuals" and other papers that contributed to the brief but enviable career of *The Seven Arts* whose editor, James Oppenheim, writes a foreword.

WALDO R. BROWNE (editor): *Man or the State?* ($1.00).

As never before, the attention of students of history is concentrated on the problems of the State and on the individual's relation to it. Such books as those by Laski, Zimmern, Follett and Burns attest the interest of contemporary scholars; this volume shows the importance to our day of their forerunners of the 19th century. It includes essays by Kropotkin, Buckle, Emerson, Thoreau, Spencer, Tolstoy and Wilde, that will live long and, as some of them are not easily accessible, the book will be doubly prized. An introduction by Mr. Browne integrates the contents and relates the best thought of the last century to the paramount political questions of our time.

By LEON DUGUIT: *Law in the Modern State* ($2.50).

M. Duguit is well-known as perhaps the most brilliant of living French political thinkers and the book here translated is generally regarded as his best and most suggestive work. The decline of the omnipotent state has forced into review the problems of representative government. M. Duguit discusses in this book the mechanisms by which the state may be made effectively responsible to its citizens. An introduction by Harold J. Laski traces the relation of his ideas to those of American and British thinkers. The book is not only a guide to the most vital of modern political problems but an analysis of jurisprudence which no lawyer can afford to ignore. The translation is by Frida and Harold Laski.

By H. N. BRAILSFORD: *The Covenant of Peace* (Paper covers, 25c.).

No man in England or America is more competent to expound the basic principles that must govern a League of Nations than Mr. Brailsford whose books and articles on the subject are well known. Here he presents the entire subject in an essay that received a prize of £100 awarded by a jury that included H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy and Professor Bury. The pamphlet is valuable to those who think they know all about the subject as well as to those who know that they know nothing about it. An introduction by Herbert Croly assists in posing the problem for the reader.

PUBLISHED BY B. W. HUEBSCH

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

DUE JAN - 6 1931
DUE JAN 8 - 1931
DUE JAN 18 1931
DUE JAN 19 1931
DUE SEP 12 33
DUE DEC - 9 '35
DUE JAN 23 '42

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google